

Emma C. Bancroft

Christmas 1926

Lydia Prescom

Whittier

1929

15th & Cherry
Phila.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LITTLE PLAYS OF ST. FRANCIS.

(18 One-Act Plays.)

FOLLOWERS OF ST. FRANCIS.

(4 One-Act Plays.)

SAINT FRANCIS POVERELLO.

(Messages of the Saints.)

SELECTED POEMS.

THE WHEEL: a Dramatic Trilogy.

THE DEATH OF ORPHEUS: A Play.

PAINS AND PENALTIES: A Play.

THE CHINESE LANTERN: A Play.

THE DEATH OF SOCRATES: A Play.

With H. Granville-Barker

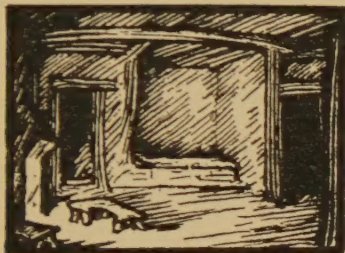
PRUNELLA: or Love in a Dutch
Garden: A Play.

Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., London

THE COMMENTS of JUNIPER

Six Plays from the Life and Legend
of St. Francis of Assisi, by

LAURENCE HOUSMAN



London

Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd.

1926

First issued, September 1926.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
THE PEACE-MAKERS	1
THE MESS OF POTTAGE	26
BROTHER ASS	46
MAKERS OF MIRACLE	59
THE ORDER OF RELEASE	76
THE LAST COMMENT	89

PREFACE

THE question has been raised of recent years whether Brother Juniper was a real person, or whether he was a game of the early Franciscans, invented for their own amusement to symbolise, under a form of comedy, the virtues of that incalculable foolishness which the example of Francis had prescribed as a spiritual *apéritif* for the Brotherhood.

Probably the truth lies half-way. Given a fool like Juniper, the Brothers were bound to celebrate him in stories more characteristic than true; Heaven having planted the nest-egg, round it they laid others.

We ourselves have lived through a generation littered with 'Spoonerisms' of spurious origin though true to type; and it really does not matter, if they are good, whether they are authentic or apocryphal. So long as the fiction does not blur the outlines of the original, we are happy in a deception that has enriched us.

But in any case, however real a person he may have been, the enlarged Juniper had a more certain origin than legend, and sprang ready

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

equipped from the heart of St. Francis ; for had Juniper not encountered the little Father he could never have become fully himself : Francis, in the best sense of the phrase, made a complete fool of him, where others would roughly have broken or cast him aside. And the importance of Juniper in the early legend lies just in this—that he exemplifies the value with which the Franciscan spirit and method endow poor common objects. Nobody but Francis could have given Juniper his foolish head, to go his own way and find himself, with such good results. The more fundamentally foolish Juniper proves himself to be in the things of this world, the more valuable Francis makes him become. For this is what he does with human nature : takes it in all its weakness, and, releasing it freely in a new direction which it would not otherwise have found, proves it good and useful for the forwarding of God's Kingdom on earth.

And so Juniper, though a laughable figure, is also a thing of worth. I doubt whether we could put up with him now ; but that is far more to the discredit of our present type of civilisation than of his, proving that we are less adaptable, and that our net has not the holding power of St. Peter's.

The age which has a use for Juniper is an age of salvation : the age which has no use for him is an age of wastefulness. Reckon him with all his

PREFACE

defects, regard him, if you must, as in the main a mild, foolish sort of savage, and then see how into this raw material comes the transforming touch of humble, serviceable love. It does not give him either culture or common-sense, but it does make an extraordinary change in the use and application of the human material; and so shows us that, in truth, love is the most civilising thing in the world. Without love Juniper would have been an unbearable boor and a cursed nuisance; but with the love brought to life in him by Francis, he becomes a symbol and example of values still to be found, permanent among the shifting qualities of human nature, and—at a distance, at any rate—a delight to all who hear truly tell of him. Of all the followers of St. Francis he had, by the world's measure of him, the poorest understanding; yet to that poor understanding love gave the surest instinct of what the spirit of Francis stood for.

L. H.

Applications regarding the amateur acting rights of these Plays should be made to the Secretary of the Incorporated Society of Authors, 11 Gower Street, London, W.C. 1.

THE PEACE-MAKERS



It is Assisi's cattle-fair. In the old Roman amphitheatre outside the walls, sheep, goats, swine, and oxen stand congregated; but here from high up on the ramparts, though heard, they are not seen. From one side of the city-gate, standing to left, the stone-work runs out at right-angles; behind and below it is a

sunk road by which all traffic enters the city. Alongside the great gate a smaller opening in the upper wall leads on to the ramparts, while down to the right, through a breach in the masonry, is a climbing-place to the road below. Seated beside the breach, FRANCIS, with face concealed in hood, leans and looks down into the market, from which come bleating and lowing of flocks and herds, and the loud babble of contending voices, sharp at their bargainings.

Within the city, bells are sounding noon; and a beautiful cadence of grace-notes is still decorating the hour, when above the hubbub of the market rings the loud crack of a whip, with the grind of upward wheels, and a waggoner's voice cheering his beast to the ascent.

WAGGONER. Up, up, up ! Corabella ! Corabella !
That 's right, my Beauty ! Courage, then, courage !
Up, up ! and it will be over !

[The waggon has come to a halt on the level below ; with an exclamation of satisfaction, the Waggoner springs up into his cart, so that his head appears above the breach.]

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

FRANCIS. A heavy load, Brother.

WAGGONER. It 's not the load ; it 's the hill.

FRANCIS. Why have you come this way—so much the steeper ?

WAGGONER. Why ? Have you seen the dead men hanging, down at the other gate ?

FRANCIS. I know of them, Brother.

WAGGONER. That 's why, then ! My ox is a Christian : he doesn't like blood—won't go where there 's the smell of it—nor the sight either.

FRANCIS. 'Tis a good reason—would others but think so. Brother Ox, what is thy name ?

WAGGONER. Name ? Corabella.

FRANCIS. A good name for a good beast. How came he by it ?

WAGGONER. I know not : it came of saying, I suppose. The right way, if a name means anything.

FRANCIS. Corabella has a beautiful heart, then ?

WAGGONER. Aye ! Can you not see it by his face ?

FRANCIS. Surely. Are you come to the fair to sell him ?

WAGGONER. Sell ? I sell Corabella ? I 'd sell my own mother first ! [*He disappears.*] Here ! on with you ! Up, up, up !

[*A crack of the whip : the waggon is in motion again. FRANCIS is leaning over to watch when he is plucked at from behind by BROTHER JUNIPER, who has come in hastily.*

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother ? Are they coming ?

JUNIPER. Some of 'em, Father. But up at the Rocca, an hour ago, they were still fighting !

THE PEACE-MAKERS

FRANCIS. The truce but began at noon, Brother.

JUNIPER. Ah ! I wish we 'd got Joshua to make it stick there ! That 'd finish it.

[*Up through the breach two countrymen come scrambling, one in flight, the other pursuing. Two others—prospective middlemen—follow, and stand watching. Wordy and gesticulative, the first comer beats off his assailant ; but the other, not to be denied, catches him violently, first by the coat, then by the hand. Faster than ear can follow runs the cry of their dispute ; which, though terrific in sound, is but the traditional method by which Italian peasants drive their bargains wherever cattle-markets are held. Wrists are wrenched, arms dragged up and down in dislocating jerks ; in the fierce gabble of contending voices, both speaking together, sense is lost.*

BUYER. Yes, yes ! a good offer ! Five ! Come now, say five !

SELLER [*wrenching, but unable to get free*]. No ! No !

BUYER. Yes !

SELLER. No ; nine ! or God let me die the death ! Nine !

BUYER. Tcha ! Christ save your senses ! There in the market for nine I could get *two*. And for *one* 'tis *five* I offer you ! Five : yes, yes ! I make you rich !

SELLER. Rich ? Ha-ha-ha-ha ! Rich in ruin ! No !

FRANCIS. Go, Brother, and tell them that we are waiting.

[*JUNIPER goes, and the wordy duel continues.*

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

The shaken hand breaks free, but is grasped again ; money is forced into it.

BUYER. But five : see, there in your hand !
Yes, yes !

SELLER [*casting it down*]. Pah ! You rip the roof off my head ! You starve me ! Shall I let my children die ? No ! Nine ! Ten !

BUYER [*running to 1st Middleman*]. Tcha ! Do you see this man ? He wants to sell me an ox for its weight in gold. I offer him a good price—five ; that is the market price, and more. He wants nine for it !

[*Simultaneously the Seller appeals to FRANCIS.*

SELLER. Oh, see, little Father ! see what this robber would do to me ! He flays the flesh off my bones ! Down there I have an ox, the best in the market ; three have offered me eight for it, that I would not take ; and now he offers five ! Five !

[*FRANCIS smiles, but is not going to interfere.*

The Buyer runs across and makes a fresh grab for the bargain.

BUYER. Yes, yes ! There ! Now you have said it yourself. Five : it is yours ! Yes !

SELLER. Cheat ! Cut-purse ! Thief ! Loose, let me go !

BUYER. Thief am I ? Why, were it my own brother, I would not offer him more !

[*And now the two Middlemen, having exchanged looks of agreement that the propitious moment has arrived, strike in and pull them apart. Then follows, to right and left, a double colloquy, to which presently three or four citizens, in the company of the returned*

THE PEACE-MAKERS

JUNIPER, *stand listening*. FRANCIS *also stays, wise to what is going on ; and though what they say simultaneously can hardly be distinguished, faces and gestures tell.*

1ST MIDDLEMAN. Here, gaffer, what 's your price—your *real* price ?

2ND MIDDLEMAN. Say, lad, but that 's a fine beast. Aren't you going to buy it ?

SELLER. Nine ; and nine's what I told him.

BUYER. Aye ! If he 'll sell it.

1ST MIDD. Yes ; but you needn't tell *me* that lie. I don't want to buy.

2ND MIDD. What 'll you give for it ?

SELLER. You want me to *sell*.

BUYER. Five's my offer.

1ST MIDD. Yes ; I do.

2ND MIDD. Yes. What may *I* offer ? You raise a bit, and I 'll see you get it.

SELLER. I knew that. *Nine*.

BUYER. Six.

1ST MIDD. Look here, you blinking blind eye ! it 's your *real* price I 'm asking.

2ND MIDD. Not enough. Make it seven, and it 'll be yours.

SELLER. Yes ; and there 's your brother talking to him. Where 'll *I* be, with the two of you ?

BUYER [*suspiciously*]. What 's *he* telling *him* ?

1ST MIDD. Saints my witness ! I won't tell him. Come, out with it !

2ND MIDD. Same as I 'm telling you—not to be a fool.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

SELLER. I've told you:
nine.

1ST MIDD. If you say
nine again, I'll give you
such a bite of the ear,
you'll remember it when
you get to Purgatory!
Now, what is it?

SELLER. As near as I
can get to it—nine. But
I'll take seven.

1ST MIDD. Ah! now
you're talking sense.
Come: I'll fix this for
you. What'll you give
me?

SELLER [*taking out four
small coins*]. Seven—one:
eight—two: nine—all
the lot.

1ST MIDD. Can't get
you nine; we'll try
eight.

BUYER. What matter
is that to you?

2ND MIDD. A good
bargain wasted. You
say five, he says nine.
What's the good of
it? If I get it you for
seven, what'll you give
me?

BUYER [*hesitating*]. I'll
give you—I'll give you—

2ND MIDD. Go on! you
know what you've *got*
to give me. You can't
halve that!

BUYER. Eh, you shall
have it, then. . . . Here!
Get it me for six, and you
shall have double.

2ND MIDD. All right:
can but try.

[*The two parties approach each other, the Middle-
men leading.*]

2ND MIDD. [*to Seller*]. Gaffer, I've been talking
to this man. He's not such a fool as he looks.
I've been telling him your beast's the finest on the
market. Didn't I, now?

BUYER. Aye: you did.

2ND MIDD. And I tell him he's a fool, if he
doesn't offer you six for it. So six he offers.

THE PEACE-MAKERS

SELLER [*indignantly*]. Six ! Here, let me get out of this ; I 'm going.

[*He makes for the breach, and is half-way through it, when his Middleman hauls him back again.*]

1ST MIDD. Come back with you, you silly old owl ! Come back !

SELLER. If I let my ox go for six, and he heard tell of it, 't 'ud break his heart ! Sell him for six ? He 'd just lie down, look at you, and die.

1ST MIDD. We aren't selling him for six, you old giddy-pate ! No fear ! Eight 's what we want.

BUYER. You 'll have to want, then.

2ND MIDD. Aye ! That won't do for us.

1ST MIDD. [*to 2ND*]. Here a minute !

SELLER [*excitedly*]. Don't you talk to him ! Don't tell him ! You promised you wouldn't tell him.

1ST MIDD. I wasn't going to *tell* him anything. You 've done it yourself now.

2ND MIDD. [*to Buyer*]. Means he 'll take seven. . . . We 'll give you seven, all right. . . . You said you would, didn't you ?

BUYER [*disappointed*]. Yes ; we must give him seven, I suppose. I 'd 'a got it for six, if you 'd let me alone.

2ND MIDD. Oh ? Here ! This fellow can do the job without me. He 'll only give you six, he says.

[*The Seller's comment is to disappear down the breach. His own Middleman and the Buyer rush after him and haul him up again.*]

1ST MIDD. You galloping goat, where are you off to ?

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

BUYER. Here's seven for you. See! Seven, seven!

SELLER. Yes, and if you'd stuck to it a minute ago, I'd have taken it. Now I want eight.

1ST MIDD. Get out with you! Seven it is; and you've got to take it. If you don't, I'll make your own beast toss you till you won't know where you are! . . . Seven, is it?

SELLER. Aye. . . . Seven it shall be.

1ST MIDD. Give him your hand to it, then!

BUYER [*cheerfully*]. Seven? Yes?

SELLER. Aye; seven's none so bad. I wouldn't 'a took six, though.

[*They join hands on the bargain in full agreement.*]

2ND MIDD. [*to Buyer*]. There! Now, are you satisfied?

[*Evidently he is. The Middlemen get their commissions, and are moving off. Others, not of the Citizens' party, have lately appeared upon the scene to become listeners. As the Seller goes FRANCIS stops him.*]

FRANCIS. Are you satisfied, Brother?

SELLER. Oh, aye! Seven is seven: eight would 'a been better. But I little thought to get it.

FRANCIS. Then why did you ask nine, Brother?

SELLER. Why do you ask for Heaven, while you are still on earth, little Father?

[*Having thus turned the laugh against FRANCIS, he goes, rather pleased with himself. FRANCIS, looking round, finds his own audience waiting for him; there, on one side, stand the Citizens, on the other—later in arriving—the Lords. It has been very evident from the*]

THE PEACE-MAKERS

first that they have no love for each other. And though all, on entering, have given up their swords to the Friars standing ready to receive them, they have not given up their suspicions of one another.

FRANCIS. O Brothers, what a waste of words was here ! Yet, in the end, how sensible !

1ST LORD [*haughtily*]. We have come at your bidding, Father Friar.

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother. Also, in counting and right reckoning, what a teaching for all of us !

1ST CIT. Teaching what, little Father ?

FRANCIS. That five joined to nine and equally divided make seven—to both bringing contentment.

1ST LORD. Why have you sent for us, Father ?

FRANCIS. Because I have something very precious to sell, and want a good price for it.

1ST CIT. You, eh ? How has the Poverello anything to sell ?

FRANCIS. It is not mine, Brother.

1ST LORD. Whose, then ?

FRANCIS. Yours, and yours. But each holds it from the other, not wishing to pay the price.

2ND LORD. These be riddles, Father.

FRANCIS. Aye : and hard ones—which you, now, are to solve for me.

1ST LORD. Then see to begin—and quickly ! For here is a smell of dog, that I like not !

[At this insult an exclamation of rage breaks from the Citizens.]

2ND CIT. Dead dogs, from the gate down yonder : still in their master's livery !

2ND LORD. For which other dogs shall pay !

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

FRANCIS. Yes, Brothers. And the price ? That is what I am asking.

1ST LORD. We will take our own price, and a stiff one. Have no fear !

FRANCIS. If all did that, there would be no cattle-market ; and Assisi would starve.

2ND LORD. 'Tis not for cattle we are here, Father Friar !

FRANCIS. No. Nor for dogs either ; but for Assisi. Look, see what is below you !

1ST LORD. What are we to see ?

FRANCIS. Simple men, Brothers : but sensible.

1ST CIT. By what sign, Father ?

FRANCIS. That which they are doing.

1ST CIT. Buying ; selling. What else should they be doing ?

FRANCIS. They might be doing nothing—were they less wise. For you cannot buy or sell without good-will, and understanding. There are no sales without agreement, Brothers.

1ST LORD. This is nothing new, Father Friar.

FRANCIS. No ; very old, Brother. Yet some take long learning it.

2ND LORD. And some take long *teaching* it.

FRANCIS. True, Brother. Now all these men have come here of one purpose ; yet of two minds. For here be buyers and sellers, all offering good value, but at different prices. The buyer will only give so much ; the seller wants so much more. And each man, naming his price, swears by all the Saints—aye, calls down Heaven to witness—that it is a just price, and that he will take no more, and no less. But Heaven is patient, hears

THE PEACE-MAKERS

both, and heeds neither. Now if these men spoke only truth, there would be no sales. But here have already been sales to-day—many scores of them. How comes that, Brothers ?

1ST CIT. Surely, little Father, a man asks what he thinks he can get ; and, if he cannot, takes less.

FRANCIS. And so doing, is wise—or foolish ?

1ST CIT. Wise, Father !

FRANCIS. And he that buys at a higher price than he first named, is he wise too ?

2ND CIT. Surely.

FRANCIS. And were both also wise when the one asked so much more, and the other offered so much less ?

2ND CIT. Why, that is but human nature, Father.

FRANCIS. And is human nature—wise ?

2ND CIT. I don't know, Father.

1ST CIT. Not always.

3RD CIT. Not to begin with, at any rate.

FRANCIS. You mean that human nature begins ill, then learns better ?

3RD CIT. Yes.

1ST CIT. Yes ; that 's about it, Father.

FRANCIS. But if it take too long learning, then will the seller's ox grow old and feeble ; and the buyer's money stay useless.

2ND CIT. Aye : so it would.

FRANCIS. So, if it be wise, human nature brings them to understanding and agreement, and a bargain is made ?

CITIZENS [*severally*]. Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Yes.

FRANCIS. And so to-day there have been many

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

sales ; and had there not been, these men, you would say, must be mad ?

1ST CIT. Why, yes ; else what use the market ?

2ND CIT. Time and labour wasted.

FRANCIS. And every ox and ass a day older ; and no one the better for it.

1ST LORD. All very true, Father. Well, I and my friends must now be going.

FRANCIS. No, Brother, for I have your word, and your swords also. And the hour is not yet over.

2ND LORD. But what has the cattle-market to do with us ? We are not cattle-dealers.

FRANCIS. Everything, my son : for though you live within walls, and seek safety in this that you call a city—and within it have built for yourself other walls and stronger, which you call a castle ; yet these poor beasts living without walls are safer. And these which own them, who also live without walls, and do not fight as you do—are safer.

1ST LORD. Making a poor life of it.

FRANCIS. They plough and sow ; they reap and gather harvest. They keep you alive and feed you. But for them you would perish. . . . [*A sound of contempt breaks from the Lords.*] And these men who within your walls keep you alive, and without walls live—I have been hearing to-day what they think of you. They are simple, Brothers, and they think you are mad.

1ST LORD. Mad, eh ? If our madness took us down into their fields—— !

FRANCIS. So it may, Brother, should your madness get worse. Through one of your gates to-day

THE PEACE-MAKERS

a wise ox would not enter, because dead men hung in it. So by its fruits is Assisi known ! They call it the 'mad city.'

1ST LORD [*pointing to Citizens*]. And there, there lies the guilt of it !

2ND LORD. And there shall the price be paid !

CITIZENS. You killed our man : we killed yours !

1ST CIT. My son was beaten dead in the market. Now five of their men have paid for it !

[*Exclamations of rage are exchanged by the two parties.*]

FRANCIS. They also had fathers, Brother. But what meaning has a market, having walls round it—if you only fight in it ? And what use a city that is divided ?

2ND CIT. We built our walls for safety, against robbers from without !

2ND LORD. We, against robbers *within* !

1ST CIT. We rob *you*, eh ?

FRANCIS. Why ask, Brother ? Are we not all robbers, receiving bounty of God, yet giving nothing in return : keeping to ourselves that which He gave us for the service of others ?

2ND CIT. Gave us what, little Father ?

FRANCIS. Love, Brother. . . . O Brothers, go, and take back your swords ! . . . and use them on each other . . . for the love of God !

[*Rather shamefaced, and doubtful of his meaning, Lords and Citizens cross over and receive back their swords.*]

1ST LORD [*halting*]. I 'm sorry, Father.

FRANCIS [*dejectedly*]. So am I, Brother.

[*All stand waiting to hear more.*]

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

I made you give up your swords : it was useless !
For though ye put swords out of your hands, in
your hearts ye kept hatred.

1ST LORD. We were willing to hear—reason,
Father.

FRANCIS. I have no reason—but love ! If with
swords ye think to love and serve God—I cannot
serve *you* ! Go back to your fighting, Brothers :
for many are still left waiting death !

1ST CIT. Little Father, have patience, be not too
hasty ! I give up my sword again.

FRANCIS. Freely, Brother ?

1ST CIT. Aye.

FRANCIS. And you—Brother ? [*The 1st Lord
hesitates.*] Nay ; if so is to be safer—keep it.

[*With a gesture of proud impatience, the 1st
Lord hands his sword back. The others follow
suit.*]

Forgive me, Brothers, that against your own will
I took them !

1ST LORD. That is now mended. Of our own
will you have them again.

FRANCIS. Then now—speak !

1ST LORD. Our castle-wall has been broken, and
must be paid for.

1ST CIT. Seventeen of our citizens are in prison.
They must be set free.

1ST LORD. All but *five*. Five of *my* men are
dead.

1ST CIT. And *my* son—that took five villains to
murder him !

FRANCIS. These now are all dead, Brothers ;
and if, as we pray, they be in God's keeping, then

THE PEACE-MAKERS

have they forgiven those on whom ye still seek vengeance. Pray for thy son, Brother ; that thou and he may be of like mind ! Pray for thy men, Brother, that as, in this life, they were thy faithful servants, thou mayest now do like service to their souls in Purgatory !

1ST LORD. These things are not done—on earth, Father.

FRANCIS. Not often, Brother ; men not having the right will.

1ST CIT. Is there to be no such thing as justice ?

FRANCIS. With God, Brother : but with men the only justice is—mercy.

1ST LORD. We ask not mercy of *any* !

FRANCIS. Some day you will have to. And God will then hear you better, if you have shown mercy to others.

1ST LORD. As *they* showed mercy ?

FRANCIS. Why make choice of so poor a pattern, Brother ? Find better ! . . . Come, if you cannot yet give me your heart, give me your hand !

1ST LORD. To what end ?

FRANCIS. That we may make a bargain.

1ST LORD [*giving his hand*]. To which yet I may say ‘no.’

FRANCIS [*to 1st Cit.*]. Now yours.

1ST CIT. Mine ? Not with his : God forbid !

FRANCIS. I have two hands, Brother. And this is not to make friends, but only a bargain. . . . For peace, Brothers, what price ?

1ST CIT. There will be no peace while *he* is alive !

FRANCIS. Your price, Brother ?

1ST CIT. His head !

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

FRANCIS. That is not yours to offer. *Your price, I said.*

1ST CIT. My own, if he can get it !

1ST LORD. Aye : and if he can get mine, let him !

FRANCIS. Here, friends, is a fair offer. These two have but to exchange heads, and we shall get peace. For the sake of the whole city, Brothers, will you not make the exchange ? 'Tis little we ask ; and outside is Peace, waiting.

1ST LORD. Are you mocking us, Father ?

FRANCIS. Indeed no. To win so great a reward very willingly would I give mine. And this little Brother will give his. Will you not, Juniper ?

JUNIPER [*tremulous, but honestly meaning it*]. Aye, Father.

FRANCIS. Let our heads, then, stand for yours. You and I, Juniper, will give up our heads, so that the city may have peace.

JUNIPER [*taking hold of FRANCIS'S cord to give himself courage*]. Yes, Father.

FRANCIS. And we do this having love for her, and not from fear of life—or of death : eh, Juniper ?

JUNIPER. No, Father.

FRANCIS. At your service, Brothers. Which of you will cut off the head of which ?

1ST CIT. Not I for either of you !

1ST LORD. Play out your own game, little Father.

FRANCIS. Why, then, Juniper, it must be you and me. Which shall begin ?

JUNIPER. Father, dear : am I to cut off your

THE PEACE-MAKERS

head? Oh, not on holy obedience! I can't do it, Father.

FRANCIS. For the peace of the city, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Not for the peace of fifty cities, I wouldn't, Father.

FRANCIS. Why, thou blood-thirsty man! Wilt thou let so many be slain, that one wretched sinner may live?

JUNIPER. They may kill me what ways they like, Father, so long as you'll keep hold of me while they do it. But you're not wanting me to kill you—not really, are you, Father dear?

FRANCIS. Not if you can find a better way, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Sure, I couldn't find a worse, Father! Besides, what have we all been making that great thing for, with me to be the inside of it, if——

FRANCIS. If you talk about it, Juniper, before any are ready to buy it of us. But now, Brother, I think they *are* ready. Go, yonder, to that place of which I have told thee. There shalt thou find one tethered and waiting for thee. Loose him, and bring him!

JUNIPER. Yes, Father. *[He runs off.]*

FRANCIS. O Brothers, are we all fools? Can we not learn wisdom of the simple? Here is our market, and all in it for sale; and we truly in want of a fair bargain, but can get nothing. And in a little while the hour will be over, and ye fighting again; and which will win ye know not. Therefore what help to Assisi? O friends and fellow-citizens, here, this once, hold open market, ere it

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

be too late ! I will be seller, and ye shall be buyers : for I have something very precious that I would sell. But unless ye buy, it is no use to me.

1ST LORD. Sell ? You ?

FRANCIS. Not for myself, but for others. See, yonder : he is waiting ! Up, up, up ! Corabella ! Corabella !

[And there enters upon the rampart a large white ox, manifestly made by the hands, not of God, but of men ; for his forelegs are the legs of JUNIPER, and his hind-legs are the legs of another Brother, and his body is made of a tub slung on a pole, covered with white cloth. And he has one bell tied to his neck, and another to his tail, which, however, is still outside ; and to his horns are bound olive-branches, and between them sits the semblance of a dove with no life in it ; and over head and shoulders goes a harness of red tassels. At his back comes an attendant crowd of Friars, and poor citizens, and children flower-bearing ; so that, before long, the walls and all points of vantage are filled with spectators, and the air becomes infected with a babble of merriment, and whenever the Ox speaks there is laughter. The feet of the messenger are entirely lovely ; but ASSISI regards him as a comic character.]

FRANCIS. Come in, little Brother ! Are you weary ? Have you come far ?

OX. Moo !

FRANCIS. No ? Only from the market ? And is none there willing to buy you at a fair price ?

OX. Moo !

THE PEACE-MAKERS

FRANCIS. Truly ? A sad world !

OX. Moo !

FRANCIS. You are right, Brother. 'Tis *not* a sad world. Only the fools that are in it make it seem so.

OX. Moo ?

FRANCIS. 'Who' *are* they ? They must answer for themselves, Brother ; and you shall judge them according to their works—whether they be fools or wise. . . . See here, Brothers—you foes that should be friends—this is Brother Ox that has come to speak with you, and to talk sense to you. With him comes Sister Peace, for she hath sent him to be her ambassador. So, when he speaks, it is her mind ; and if he speak not, it is her mind also. See, how to his horns she hath bound two olive-branches ; and between them sits a dove—waiting. . . . Has no one here any bread to offer to Brother Ox—for love of Sister Peace ? [*To 1st Cit.*] I pray you, Brother !

1ST CIT. I have no bread.

[*As FRANCIS looks about, another comes to the rescue.*]

A POOR CIT. There 's for you, little Father !

FRANCIS [*to 1st Lord*]. And you, Brother ?

1ST LORD. I do not carry bread about, Father !

FRANCIS. No ? Give him some of yours, Brother.

[*He divides the bread between Lord and Citizen.*]

1ST LORD. What fool's play is this, I would know ?

FRANCIS. You shall know, presently. Stand you this side : you that.

[*He ranges Lord and Citizen in two places apart.*]
Now, offer your bread ! Hold it out, Brother !

[*To the alternative before him the Ox sways*]

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

a hesitating head, undecided which way to go.

See, alas ! you being divided, he knows not which to take, so remains hungry ! And had I the judgment of Solomon to cut him in half, it would do no good ; for with his hind-quarters he can eat nothing, and without them would be of no mind to. But stand together, Brothers ; nay, nearer, come nearer ! [*He brings the two together.*] And you, Brothers, as many as will, go, hold him by the tail, and see if you can prevent that which shall now follow.

[*Two of the Citizens go accordingly, and draw out the tail as for a tug of war.*

Now, try again !

[*The simplified problem produces the desired effect ; advancing with his fore-feet only, the Ox elongates himself across the stage, and eats the bread. It is a triumph of the unexpected ; the populace, falling to mirth, applauds rapturously.*

Oh, see the following, the following, the following of peace !

[*The Ox, having devoured both pieces, still stands with extended head on extended body ; and with fore-foot beats the ground.*

Brother, collect yourself !

OX. Moo !

FRANCIS [*supplying his wants*]. What, more ?

OX. Moo !

FRANCIS. And more ?

OX. Moooo-oo !

FRANCIS. And after that, still more ? . . . O

THE PEACE-MAKERS

friends, is not this a fair riddle, with a straight answer ?

1ST LORD. Straightly put, Father ; but I see not the answer.

1ST CIT. You answer it for us, little Father.

FRANCIS. Why, surely ! See, Brothers : here is one that loves both of you, and willingly would do as each wishes. But while ye go divided, he cannot. If both went together, he could go with you ; and ye would lose nothing. So it is, Brothers, in all your contentions : if ye would come together loss and division would be over.

1ST LORD. Easily said, little Father.

FRANCIS. O Brothers, is not Assisi one city ? Do not her walls embrace all, and her gates open and shut as with consent, so that men going forth free, here come back to find shelter ? How then can it be for good that, in her midst, ye her own children are divided ? Only come together, Brothers, and ye shall miss nothing ! For this contention, costing so much, does but breed weakness ; and though ye swear ye love her, it is only yourselves ; and while your lips say, 'It is for Assisi !' your deeds say, 'Down, down with Assisi !'

CROWD. Assisi ! Assisi ! Life and peace for Assisi !

FRANCIS. O Brothers, heal her of her wounds, strengthen her gates, build up her walls, and let her towers have eyes, that—thence looking—ye may see the day-spring from on high visiting her, and the bright and the morning star, which is God's love for all of us !

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

O little Children, if He denied you His love, as ye deny it to each other, what hope in the world would be left? Brother sinners, be a little like God—only a little! Is it so hard for you to find, each in his own heart, that ye are His children? Must the other first be penitent ere ye will do each to other the work of Christ? For had Christ waited till our repentance, He had never come!

*[Again the bells of Assisi break up the stillness ;
the hour of the truce is over, but the truce holds ;
all stay listening.]*

Hark, Brothers! There is a lovely sound, the song of Assisi. Many afar off are hearing it; and when they hear it they say—‘That is Assisi!’ Do you remember, Brothers, how that hearing brought peace to the heart of Brother Lupo—now at rest in God—so that instead of an enemy he became a friend, and we feared him no more? Will ye be harder of heart than that robber? Will ye, of all the bounty of His love that ye have received, give back nothing to Christ, who—whether ye be first or last—gives unto last even as unto first—peace passing understanding; love, that no man can measure, embracing all. . . . Here is the answer to the riddle, Brothers; and by no other way shall it be found. Will ye find it, or will ye lose it again? Will ye not make peace?

CROWD. Aye! Give us peace! Give us peace!

1ST LORD. Enough: so be! Have your will! But I yield not for fear!

FRANCIS. No, Brother: nor for love either. Forgive me, that I have not won—your heart!

1ST LORD [*ironically*]. That I do—heartily!

THE PEACE-MAKERS

FRANCIS. Freely, also ?

1ST LORD [*striking him*]. Aye ! By this hand !

FRANCIS. Why then—all is well, Brother.

1ST LORD [*kneeling*]. O little Father, little Father ! I did it but to prove thee—not knowing, not being sure.

FRANCIS. Now that you know, Brother, the rest should be easy.

1ST LORD. It shall be, little Father. . . . Here is my hand. . . . Do with it as you will !

1ST CIT. Here is mine, Father.

FRANCIS [*joining their hands*]. Here, then, is the riddle solved, Brothers ; though there has been blood on them. . . . Will ye now, for the sake of Peace, do all that I shall ask of you ?

1ST LORD. You may decide, Father.

1ST CIT. Justly : is all I ask.

FRANCIS. Aye : mercifully. . . . You, Brother, will release all the prisoners you have taken. You, Brother, will mend the walls you have broken. Do not break walls again, Brother. Brother, do not make prisoners ; for he that puts others in prison is himself a prisoner. Also, together, take down the dead, and bury them. . . . That is all, Brothers. You agree ?

1ST CIT. My son shall be buried with them, Father.

1ST LORD. Here are the keys, Father. The prisoners are yours.

FRANCIS. Here, then, is Peace, Brothers !

[*He takes the olive-branches from the horns of the Ox, and presents them.*]

For these be of her sending. Plant them, and they

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

shall grow. And now, for Brother Ox, what gifts have you in return? For he has been very patient.

[*Lords and Citizens crowd round the Ox, and begin loading him with offerings. For each in turn the Ox has but one word, but he makes good use of it. One gives his gold chain; another his cloak, others their swords and girdles; another a shield. Over these children throw garlands of flowers. All is done to an accompaniment of laughter, hand-clapping, and shouting. From a distance comes the sound of singing. The air rings with the noise of bells.*

FRANCIS [*as he watches the pile grow*]. That is good, that is good, Brothers! Put them on, little Brother, put them all on! For this is the making of peace, little Brother: and as thou wast the foundation, so now on thee comes the building.

O friends, lovers of Assisi, let us give thanks together for Brother Ox! For never since Ass spake to Prophet, has God by the mouth of beast done such wonder! How now, little Brother?

[*For the Ox is showing perturbation; and now out of the head comes the voice of* BROTHER JUNIPER.

JUNIPER. Lord! in here is so hot, if I'm not out in another minute I'll be dead and gone to glory!

[*The laughter, in which this protest is overborne, is itself now swallowed up in a larger volume of sound. A palm-bearing procession of*

THE PEACE-MAKERS

Friars and Citizens has entered, and in its rapture of song and movement bears the whole crowd away with it. In its midst, pushed and pulled by a score of helping hands, and burdened with its weight of offerings, goes the still elongated body of Brother Ox. Faint, yet pursuing, in a world that has turned to song, he becomes the very centre of the triumph he has helped to create. The arm of the little Father lies across his neck ; and could any doubt the happiness that has now come to him, the prancing of his feet would declare otherwise.

OMNES. Awake ! Awake ! Lift up thy voice

For a people's sake, O City of Sion,

And rejoice, rejoice greatly,

With a song !

For with mercy and pity

Comes Peace to her city,

And the days of her dwelling

Shall be long.

Awake ! Awake ! Lift up thy voice,

And rejoice, rejoice greatly

With a song !

CURTAIN

THE MESS OF POTTAGE



It is night at the Friary of the Portiuncula. In his cell sits FATHER MATTEO, rather old and frail, occupying for the nonce the unwonted position of Father Guardian in the temporary absence of the Father Minister, ELIAS. . . . Before him stand two of the Brethren, accuser and accused: BROTHER RUFUS the one, BROTHER JUNIPER the

other. FATHER MATTEO, weary under the burden of office, and conscious of his inadequacy to fill the shoes that have been thrust upon him, does his conscientious best, and having heard the complaint, deals out reproof with a forced note which, though it might not deceive others, is effective upon this particular culprit.

MATTEO. Always another complaint! And then another! And another! I am sick of hearing them. You make my life a burden, and bring confusion on the community. Can we not have peace? Can we not have order? Can we not have sanity—seemliness—decency even? What wast thou standing on thy head for?

JUNIPER. It's one of the few things I can do with it, Father. It's no good for thinking; and God must have meant it to have *some* use, Father.

RUFUS. Also he was singing, Father Guardian.

MATTEO. Singing? What was he singing?

THE MESS OF POTTAGE

RUFUS. I don't know, Father. It sounded like blasphemy.

MATTEO. Brother Juniper, what were you singing?

JUNIPER. Only the truth, Father. But what I said it's hard now to remember.

MATTEO. It should not be hard to remember the truth.

JUNIPER. No, but the words, Father. I'd only just made them up, to suit myself.

MATTEO. Made them up: why?

JUNIPER. 'Twas about Father Elias going to Rome, and not taking me with him. I don't doubt they were foolish, Father, as I made them. You don't want to hear the words, do you, Father?

MATTEO. On holy obedience, Brother, say the words!

JUNIPER. O Lord! Here goes, then:—

[JUNIPER *kneels, and with twisted head touching the ground, begins to recite.*

‘Domine, Domine’s gone to Rome. . . . Praise the Lord!

And—nunc dimittis—I’m left at home. . . . Praise the Lord!

So this way up ye’ve got to go. . . . Praise the Lord!

For a kiss of the Holy Father’s toe. . . . Praise the Lord!

And whether you get to Rome or no, praise the Lord!’

And then the ‘Gloria,’ Father: that was all.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

RUFUS. No ; that wasn't all, Father ! For then he put his feet in the milk, and upset it.

JUNIPER. I didn't see it, Father ! There he 'd put down the pail, and was looking at me with his eyes out. 'For shame, Brother ! Get up !' he says. And when I got up my feet were in it, Father.

RUFUS. And getting out, he spilt it, Father.

MATTEO. O body of an ass, the folly that is in thee : ever finding ways for fresh mischief !

[In an exaltation of abasement, JUNIPER gazes at him with rapture. This seems to light a spark ; having a duty to perform, the mild Father Guardian batters himself into a fury.]

Brother Juniper, stand up and kneel !—stand up and kneel ! And go on doing so for penance while I now teach thee thy—thy uselessness, thy foolishness, thy blindness, and thy presumption !

[And as JUNIPER falls to penitential gymnastics, he continues :

Thou art a perverse mule, Brother Juniper ; there is no light in thee, no sense, no reason, no understanding, no moderation, no shame ! Nothing that goes into thy ears finds lodging in thy head ; thy mouth is for noise only ; never has it been heard to utter sense. Thy brains are the brains of a beast ; one must break them before one can get at them. Thy skull is fit only for cudgelling, and thy back for a like beating. Thou art a blame to us instead of a blessing ; instead of a help, thou art a hindrance ; nothing that thou doest has a use. Cease now from thy dippings and thy duck-

THE MESS OF POTTAGE

ings : cease, I tell thee ! If thou wast a bucket, I could send thee down to a well, and bring thee up full again ; but thou art more useless than a bucket—for whatever we set thee to do, thou returnest again empty.

[*During this tirade, FATHER MATTEO has started a cough, which now takes such hold that further speech becomes difficult.*

JUNIPER. Yes, Father dear, it's all true ! But for the love of God, don't hurt yourself—else I'll break my heart !

MATTEO. Away with him, Brother ! Remove him from my sight. O Juniper, the trouble, the trouble, the trouble thou art to me ! Go ! And the Lord give thee the beginnings of a mind, and rid thee of the fleas of folly which now infest thee ! I would say more, but at this time I cannot. Away ! Depart ! Get thee to bed, and leave me to mine ; and if I die in it to-night, may the Lord not charge it against thee.

[*Again his coughing overwhelms him.*

JUNIPER. God rest you to peace, Father dear ! The Lord love you !

[*MATTEO gesticulates feebly with his hands, and*

JUNIPER goes.

MATTEO. 'Peace' ! . . . Oh, what are we to do, Brother, what are we to do with that poor perfect ass ? I have beaten him till I am ashamed ; and it does no good, no good at all ! He likes it ! Thou canst see by his face that he likes to be beaten ! And now the fit of mischief on him ; and the little Father away sick at Rieto, returning we know not when ; and Father Minister Elias gone to Rome,

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

leaving his office to me ! It is only these two can manage Brother Juniper.

RUFUS. Only one, Father ; Father Minister cannot.

MATTEO. Sometimes he can ; Brother Juniper being so much afraid of him.

RUFUS. Not much more, Father, than he is of Brother Juniper.

MATTEO. Indeed ? Were that true, Brother, it would be a great marvel.

RUFUS. So it is, Father.

MATTEO. Why should Father Elias fear Brother Juniper ?

RUFUS. Because, Father, there is something in Brother Juniper that he cannot understand.

MATTEO. That none of us can understand, Brother.

RUFUS. That he *fears* to understand.

MATTEO. Why so, Brother ?

RUFUS. It is something the little Father understands. Brother Elias fears also the little Father.

[This is a confidence, reflecting on authority, which delegated authority must not countenance. But the rebuke is only uttered in mild tones.]

MATTEO. Brother, on holy obedience, I charge thee not to say such things—nor even to think them. They are not good for thee.

RUFUS. Very well, Father. On holy obedience I will try not to think them.

MATTEO. I am older than thou art, Brother ; and have been here much longer ; so now am left in authority, till Father Elias returns. But there

THE MESS OF POTTAGE

are things, Brother, which I do not let myself think—for fear lest they should be true.

RUFUS. Maybe that is—wise, Father.

MATTEO. Surely, Brother. God does not wish us to understand everything. But He rules all things ; and out of doubt and evil can bring good.

[Again his cough troubles him.]

RUFUS. Yes, Father.

MATTEO. Go, Brother, and get me something to drink.

RUFUS. There is no milk, Father.

MATTEO. Then some water.

RUFUS. I must go down to the well for it.

MATTEO. I will wait, Brother.

[At the door RUFUS turns, a little shamefaced.]

RUFUS. I am sorry, Father, that I brought thee a complaint.

MATTEO. You did quite right, Brother. Juniper must be taught to know better when he does wrong.

RUFUS. But he never will, Father.

MATTEO. No, Brother ; but we must still try—and not be angry with him ; though, for his good, we must pretend to be.

[He coughs again.]

RUFUS. Yes, Father.

MATTEO. The water, Brother.

[RUFUS goes. And now, left to himself, FATHER

MATTEO sits gently coughing. Then he gets up, takes the candle from its niche, and carries it over to the bed. There he sets it down again, takes up his beads, crosses himself, and leaning back along the bed is beginning his prayers, when the door softly opens behind his back, and in comes BROTHER JUNIPER, bearing a

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

bowl with something steaming in it. JUNIPER, slow to disturb the Father's devotions, stands watching till a slight cough of the afflicted throat decides him.

JUNIPER. Father. . . . Father, dear !

MATTEO. Brother Juniper ! I told you to go to bed.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father.

MATTEO. Why have you not gone ?

JUNIPER. I was disobedient, Father ; so have now come to ask thy forgiveness.

MATTEO. For being disobedient ?

JUNIPER. Yes, Father.

MATTEO. *Why* were you disobedient ?

JUNIPER. Making this, Father.

MATTEO. Making what ?

JUNIPER. For *you*, Father.

MATTEO. ' Making *what*, ' I said.

JUNIPER. It's a broth, Father ; hot wine with honey in it ; flour, butter, and a pinch of spice—the surest cure in the world that you could take, Father.

MATTEO. Why do you bring it here, Brother, disturbing me again at this time of night ?

JUNIPER. Sure ! Didn't I hear your poor throat get sore with the scolding you gave me ? Didn't I hear it making you cough ? Didn't it make you leave off before you'd said a real hard word to me ? And am I not to be skinned and put in my right place just from it making your throat sore ; and not to be told all the other wise things you'd got up your sleeve to say to me when the cough came and stopped you ?

THE MESS OF POTTAGE

MATTEO. I had quite done, Brother ; and I am not going to begin again now.

JUNIPER. No, Father ; and you needn't if you don't like ! So when you told me to go and repent, I took my repentance to the kitchen—Brother Rufus being out of it—and here it is for you. Try it, Father ! Sit up and eat it !

MATTEO. Why have I to eat your repentance, Brother Juniper ?

JUNIPER. Sure, because it 'll be good for you—and for your throat too. Oh, don't you be stiff-necked, Father. Just one sip from the spoon : it 's not a thing you 'll leave off, once you 've begun. . . . What ? Haven't you forgiven me yet, Father ? . . . Then, maybe, if I just leave it—there. . . .

[He puts it down by the candle, moves away, then stops again. Invention has come to him.]

And now that I 'm thinking of it, Father—maybe it wasn't me that made it at all, but Brother Rufus.

[He is almost out of the room, when the voice of FATHER MATTEO stops him.]

MATTEO. Brother !

JUNIPER. You called, Father ?

MATTEO. Come back, Brother. . . . Sit down. . . . Here—by the bed. Give me the bowl, Brother. . . . Yes : if you will share it with me, then I will.

JUNIPER. So long as you eat most, Father.

MATTEO. Your sharing will make it seem more, Juniper.

[So, with one spoon between them, the feast begins.]

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

JUNIPER. Oh ! But isn't it good, Father !

MATTEO. *It is* : very like thee, Brother—sweet and warm and comforting.

[*Enter RUFUS with the water. He stops, and gazes in astonishment.*

RUFUS. Here is the water, Father.

MATTEO. Thank you, Brother ; but now I do not need it. Brother Juniper has brought me something better. . . . Set it down, over there, Brother.

[*RUFUS does so.*

RUFUS. Is that all, Father ?

MATTEO. That is all, Brother Rufus. Good-night.

[*RUFUS goes : and MATTEO continues.*
Brother Juniper, what fools we are—all of us !

JUNIPER. Yes ? Are we, Father ?—besides me, I mean ?

MATTEO. We are all fools in the eyes of God, Brother.

JUNIPER. True, Father ; but we don't mind that, do we ? It's the eyes of men.

MATTEO. Dost *thou* mind the eyes of men, Brother ?

JUNIPER. There's just one—or two, maybe.

MATTEO. The little Father ?

JUNIPER. No, I don't mind *him*, Father : he sees the way God sees : he understands.

MATTEO. But you fear God, Brother.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father ; but He doesn't frighten me like Father Elias does.

MATTEO [*amused*]. No, Brother ?

JUNIPER. Or like the Devil does.

MATTEO. Come, come, Brother ; you must not

THE MESS OF POTTAGE

put Father Elias and the Devil together like that!

JUNIPER. No, Father, and I am always trying my best to keep 'em separate. Father Elias is a holy man, I know. All the same, he frightens me.

MATTEO. You mean, when he has to reprove you?

JUNIPER. Aye; and when he hasn't got to, it's the same.

MATTEO. Brother—did *I* frighten you?

JUNIPER. No . . . no, Father dear. You haven't got it in you! You aren't holy enough. . . . But I'm sorry, Father.

MATTEO. We are both sorry, Brother.

[FATHER MATTEO *has now had his fill of the broth; he gives back the bowl.*

JUNIPER. Won't you finish it, Father?

MATTEO. No . . . I leave that to you, Brother. . . . I want to tell you something.

[JUNIPER *has been draining the bowl: he stops now, and sets it down.*

Though I sounded angry, I was not angry. But I had a duty to do—laid on me by Father Minister—he being absent.

JUNIPER. Happen you've done all the good you could to me, Father: made me ashamed of the trouble I am to you.

MATTEO. A good trouble, Brother, a very good trouble; but a troublesome one, for all that.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father: but I've been thinking. . . .

MATTEO. Well, Brother?

JUNIPER. Does God find us a great trouble,

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

d'you think, Father—when we sin away from Him ?

MATTEO. 'Sin away from Him' ? What made you say that, Juniper ? Where did you find—that ?

JUNIPER. Isn't it true, Father ? Isn't all our sins just through being away from God ?—maybe, only a little way—but far enough for us not to see Him : not so far but what He can see us, though.

MATTEO [*deep in the thought of it*]. Sin away from God. . . . Sin. . . . Separation. A good thought, Brother.

JUNIPER. Is it, Father ?

MATTEO. Separation. . . . Separation the only sin !

JUNIPER. So, if He sees that, Father : sees across, when we don't see—maybe *He* 's not so angry with us either, as we think, Father ?

MATTEO. Maybe not, Brother.

JUNIPER. Though we deserve well that He should be. He can't be !

MATTEO. Can't be what ?

JUNIPER. Can't be so angry as we think, Father. . . . You know, Father, God doesn't think as we do. If He did, He 'd make mistakes like we do. But that wouldn't bring Him nearer to us, would it, Father ? . . . He 'd be more like us ; but He 'd be further away. . . .

[FATHER MATTEO *has now perceived that this is JUNIPER'S hour ; and spiritually he seats himself at his feet to listen.*

MATTEO [*softly*]. Go on, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Like men—kept apart—through not having love for each other.

THE MESS OF POTTAGE

MATTEO. Separates, being sinners. Yes ?

JUNIPER. I'm thinking, Father !

MATTEO. Yes, Brother ? Go on thinking.

JUNIPER. Here am I, a great sinner, Father.

MATTEO. Maybe, Brother. That are we all.

JUNIPER. But I think there's times when I'm a bigger fool than I am a sinner.

MATTEO. Yes ? . . . Yes, Brother ?

JUNIPER. And isn't that better, Father, than if it was the other way, being more of a sinner, and less of a fool ?

MATTEO. Much better, Brother, when the fool is after *thy* kind.

JUNIPER. So God's making me a fool has been a great work of mercy, maybe.

MATTEO. For many of us it has been, Brother.

JUNIPER. The little Father, first time I ever set eyes on him, told me that ! 'A good fool,' he said, 'is a great work of mercy.' 'For why ?' I said to him. 'Because God has saved him without making him wise,' he says. . . . Eh ? but isn't the little Father wonderful ? Then I couldn't understand, hardly anything. . . . Now . . . I understand *him*. . . . It's the only thing I do, Father.

MATTEO. That is to understand a great thing, Brother.

JUNIPER. Yes ; but there's many wiser that doesn't.

MATTEO. Wiser ?

JUNIPER. Father, why am I such a fool ? Of course it was God's will, I know. But why was it God's will ? God never willed any man to be a sinner, did he, Father ?

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

MATTEO. No, Brother.

JUNIPER. But He willed me to be a fool.

MATTEO. Well ?

JUNIPER. So He must have had a reason for it.

MATTEO. No doubt, Brother.

JUNIPER. And though I'll never be sure of the true reason—*His* reason—yet I may have happened to hit on it by mistake, through not knowing.

MATTEO. Well, Brother : and so ? What reason have *you* found for it ?

JUNIPER. It's like this, Father. I'm the biggest fool was ever met in this world : there's no denying that, Father.

MATTEO. Perhaps not, Brother.

JUNIPER. But for all that I'm not a *damned* fool, Father. God has never damned me for it : and isn't going to.

MATTEO. No, Brother.

JUNIPER. Well, then, now : isn't God's use for me just to show there needn't be a damned fool in all the world ?

MATTEO. You should tell this to the little Father, Brother.

JUNIPER. If it's true, the little Father knows it already.

MATTEO. Very likely, Brother. Perhaps that is why you are so much to him. For next to Brother Leo, I think he loves you best of all.

JUNIPER. Aye : but isn't it wonderful how he can love one such as me ?

MATTEO. He does not love thee more than God loves thee, Juniper.

JUNIPER. That's all beyond *me*, Father. Not

THE MESS OF POTTAGE

that it isn't true : but there 's truth the likes of me can't understand.

MATTEO. Do not try to understand, Brother : only believe ! To believe without understanding is easier for the foolish than for the wise. So by simplicity fools may come nearer to God, where the desire for understanding keeps wise men distant. How, then, can we say ' this man is wiser,' or ' this man has more understanding,' if he that is without understanding is the nearer. . . . Brother, I see through a gate, to a place where love means everything ; but I have not myself such love as thou hast—thou, and the little Father. . . .

[So saying, FATHER MATTEO lies back, and, while still speaking, composes himself for rest.]

You must be very happy, Brother Juniper : free from doubt, free from care, free—from everything ! Could you choose now, would you be otherwise ?

JUNIPER. Surely no, Father. Should any man choose to be otherwise than as God made him ? I don't deny, Father, there 's times when being a fool is a trouble to me ; and a thorn in the flesh to me—through not knowing. Aye : it 's a trouble when our Lord tells us to do one thing ; and all the world, and Holy Church, and Father Elias says you ought to ha' done another. Which are you to do then, Father ?

MATTEO. Do always what you believe right, Brother ; and if that is wrong, repent of it afterwards.

JUNIPER. It 's what I do, Father.

MATTEO. For instance ?

JUNIPER. A week ago, Father. And just as he

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

was starting off, Father Elias got word of it. I thought I'd done right; but I've had to repent of it ever since *he* heard tell about it!

MATTEO. What was it, Brother?

JUNIPER. Nothing worth talking about, Father! And hadn't Father Elias come to hear of it, 'twould have troubled me so little that by now I'd have forgotten it. But if I was wrong just doing that, it makes me afraid to do anything.

MATTEO. Doing what, Brother?

JUNIPER. 'Twas on the way up from Portiuncula, Father, that I overtook a poor woman—so young she might have been a maid, but carrying her own child: and that such a bit of a size it looked as it had hardly been born. A cold day it was—rain, and a rough wind, and she with so little on—head and feet—she looked like a skinned rabbit, hardly alive. So what else could I do but pull off my cloak and give it her? And she the shorter by a foot, and narrow to match, it all hung down after her like a bishop's train, so you couldn't see her feet, nor her head neither, the cowl so covering it. And there was I walking beside, dressed like one of the Holy Innocents, with nothing to my back but a good conscience, and my breeches to keep me in decent company. 'Twould have been all right for haymaking or harvest, but 'twas all wrong, so they tell me, for the road up to Assisi, with the Bishop himself just coming out of the gate riding on his white ass. I kneeled down, and she kneeled down for to get his blessing; but not a look nor a finger would he give either of us; and two hours later Father Elias had heard of it—and

THE MESS OF POTTAGE

so had I! . . . What ought I to have done, Father?

MATTEO. As I said before, Brother—done as you thought right, and then taken the blame for it.

JUNIPER. Which I did, Father.

MATTEO. Blame is good for us, Brother—even when we do not deserve it. And if we so accept it—*God* is not angry. Therefore I say, keep always a good conscience; and though it save thee not from many reproaches, yet it shall bring thee to the light.

JUNIPER. The light, eh? More time it seems to leave me in darkness. Conscience is like a flea, Father.

MATTEO. Why like a flea, Brother?

JUNIPER. Because it always sees a man naked—and when it gets to the weakest part of him, it bites. And there's no running away from it, is there, Father? A flea may only jump a pig's length, while the man it's on runs twenty; but it's still on him when he stops his running. He may get to the other side of himself, or of the world even: turn himself inside out, or upside down—but he hasn't got rid of it yet. Jonah found that out, didn't he? And I was standing on my head for the same reason.

MATTEO. Reason?

JUNIPER. Trying to see myself, and Father Elias—differently.

MATTEO. Well, Brother: did you succeed?

JUNIPER [*too deep in his reflections to answer*]. You know, Father, we talk of guardian angels as

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

if they were great big things, bright, and shining, and beautiful—outside of ourselves. But I think, maybe, they are little dark things, moving about in our insides—like fleas ; but with wings to 'em.

MATTEO. More like mosquitoes, then.

JUNIPER. Aye : for they come singing and twanging their harps, don't they, Father ? And you don't feel the bite of 'em all at once : but when they 've gone they leave a lump on you.

MATTEO. And do angels, Brother ?

JUNIPER. Aye : in my throat they do ! So he having gone, I was trying to look at Father Elias as if he were an angel, and as if I 'd still got him with me—like a conscience. But I hadn't, Father. He was gone—clean out of me : and I terribly glad of it ! That 's why I was calling myself 'Nunc dimittis.' Did you know that, Father ?

MATTEO. No. . . . But I think now you had better be quiet, or talk of something else, Brother.

[This is said in a tone and with pauses which show that FATHER MATTEO is getting drowsy.]

JUNIPER sits a while in meditation ; but when he speaks again his new subject is still the old one.

JUNIPER. Hiding. . . . We are always hiding from something, aren't we, Father ? . . . either from ourselves, or from each other ; or more often it 's from God.

MATTEO. Yes, more often from God, Brother.

JUNIPER. And it 's no use, is it, Father ? For what does the Scripture tell us ? . . . I wish I could read, Father ; then I 'd remember better

THE MESS OF POTTAGE

which was which of 'em. But the good and the bad and the mixed were all alike—always trying to hide themselves. Adam and Eve in the Ark among the animals.

MATTEO. No, no, Brother. That was Noah.

JUNIPER. Oh, aye! Adam did it among the animals in the garden, didn't he?—because he was naked like them. And Joseph did it in a sack of flour. . . . From Potiphar's wife, that was. And Balaam in the ass's mouth; and Elijah in the wilderness, till he went up in a fiery furnace; and Moses in the burning bulrushes, where Pharaoh's daughter found him. . . . 'Twas never any good, was it, Father?

MATTEO. . . . None, Brother.

JUNIPER. Yet there was the woman that our Lord told us of, that took and hid the leaven in three measures of flour. And that was right of her, wasn't it, Father? [*He waits, but there is no answer.*] And our Lady hid things in her heart, too: eh, didn't she, Father?

MATTEO [*drowsily, after a pause*]. Yes, Brother.

JUNIPER. And once we are told of our Lord, too—how He went out and hid Himself, for fear of the Jews. Why was that, Father?

MATTEO [*once more after a pause, and with effort*]. Because . . . His hour . . . was not yet come, Brother.

JUNIPER. I often wish my hour hadn't, when Father Elias sends for me. But I daren't go and hide myself then. It wouldn't be right, would it, Father?

MATTEO. . . . No, Brother.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

JUNIPER. So it always brings you back to your conscience : there 's no getting away from it. And it 's no use hiding from it—never.

MATTEO. Never.

[MATTEO'S voice has now sunk to a mere whisper in its response ; but JUNIPER, unheeding, goes on.

JUNIPER. Conscience is a wonderful thing ! . . . That you can have a conscience without having the brains for it . . . that it just comes . . . that it 's there . . . that you keep it . . . that it keeps you . . . that there it is tucked right away inside . . . and yet all round you as well . . . like God Himself : like as if it was just part of Him, that He 's given to be part of you. . . . Oh, isn't it wonderful ? . . .

[Getting no answer, JUNIPER turns and looks at the now sleeping FATHER MATTEO.

JUNIPER. Are you asleep, Father dear ?

[Having satisfied himself on that point, he breaks out into more tenderness than would otherwise be allowed him.

Oh, dear Father ! dear Father ! . . . there you lie, so tired out with all you 've been doing for us, and all the trouble I 've been to you ! And when the little Father 's away—like he is now—you remind us of him. And when Father Elias is away, you try to remind us of him, too, don't you, Father ? . . . But you don't.

[He shakes his head, sighs, crosses himself, then rises.

God give you good sleep, Father ! And a good end to all of us in the blessed faith of His love.

THE MESS OF POTTAGE

[He goes, stepping cautiously, picks up the bowl, and puts out the light. And as he does so, very softly he sings :

Domine, Domine 's gone to Rome.

Praise the Lord !

So Nunc Dimittis is left at home.

Praise the Lord !

And this is the way we 've got to go.

Praise the Lord !

For a kiss of the Holy Father's toe.

Praise the Lord !

And whether we get to Rome or no—

Praise the Lord.

[He is still singing the last words as he goes out, closing the door behind him.

CURTAIN

BROTHER ASS



Outside the walls of the Friary, on a bench by the gate, BROTHER ANGELO and BROTHER PACIFICO sit sunning themselves, and saying their office. Thus placed for outlook on the world, they combine the edification of their souls, with the diversion of their minds by what passes. But, at this moment, diversion has come rather from

within the community than from without. At the entrance of the gate, BROTHER JEROME and BROTHER SIMON have managed between them to spill a sack of flour, and are now bickering over it. The two seated Brothers continue conscientiously to recite the praise of Heaven; but, except as a demonstration, their hearts are no longer in it. As SIMON stands shaking off the flour which has poured over him, he speaks his mind, while simultaneously the praying goes on.

SIMON. You greasy-hoofed horse !

ANGELO. Domine ! Domine !

JEROME. You stumbling ass !

PACIFICO. Domine ! Domine !

SIMON. If it were not a sin, Brother, I should now say something !

ANGELO. Eripe me, Domine, ab homine malo !

JEROME. Say it, whited sepulchre ! Say it !

PACIFICO. A viro iniquo eripe me !

BROTHER ASS

SIMON. The Lord hath afflicted thee with crookedness, Brother—so that thine eyes *squint* !

[JEROME *stoops, takes up flour, is about to throw it.* ANGELO *interjects a word, then reverts to his praying.*

ANGELO. Brother ! Brother ! Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine.

[PACIFICO, *with similar interjection, first overlaps, then carries on and shares in antiphon the praying of* ANGELO.

PACIFICO. Do not waste it, Brother ! Domine, Domine, quis sustinebit ? Quia apud Dominum misericordia ; et copiosa apud eum redemptio.

JEROME [*meanwhile*]. Waste it ? The wasting was his, not mine : what did he go and upset it for ?

SIMON. I didn't ; you pushed me.

JEROME. I didn't ; you did it yourself.

ANGELO. You both did it, Brothers ! . . . Domine, Domine !

SIMON. D' you want to be rolled in it, too ?

PACIFICO [*dissociating himself in haste*]. Domine, Domine, ad te, Domine, clamabo. Deus meus ne sileas a me !

[*Meanwhile* ANGELO *is speaking.*

ANGELO. No, Brother, I do *not*. On holy obedience, I command you not to roll me in it.

JEROME [*who has been nursing his rage and his handful of flour together*]. Crooked, eh ? Squint, do I ? Is that straight enough ?

[*He discharges his handful in the face of* BROTHER SIMON. SIMON *springs on him, and bears him down into the flour-heap.*

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

SIMON. Into it yourself, Leper! Dip, and be clean!

[With a cloud of flour for accompaniment, the two are confusedly scuffling on the ground, when FRANCIS enters. He moves feebly, the marks of his sickness heavy upon him.]

FRANCIS. What is this, Brothers?

PACIFICO *[seeking shelter in the obvious]*. It is the flour, Father. . . . Nequando taceas a me; et assimilabor descendentibus in lacum.

[Thus, with disjointed persistence, his voice trails off into muttered recitation. Meanwhile

ANGELO.

ANGELO. They are always quarrelling, little Father; and it makes praying so difficult. . . . Exaudi, Domine, vocem deprecationis meae, dum oro ad te.

[And meanwhile PACIFICO continues the explanation, then once more takes refuge in prayer.]

PACIFICO. For no sooner have they finished one, Father, than they begin another. . . . Dum extollo manus meas ad templum sanctum tuum.

[So, back at their devotions, the two remain exemplary symbols of pious duty done under difficulty.]

FRANCIS. What is the flour there for, Brothers?

JEROME. Because he upset it.

SIMON. I upset it because he pushed me.

JEROME. I pushed him because he got in my way.

SIMON. I got in his way because I needed room, and there was no other way.

JEROME. So of course I pushed him!

BROTHER ASS

FRANCIS [*in pretended agreement*]. Of course, Brother.

SIMON. Does the way only belong to him, then?

FRANCIS. Does it, Brother?

JEROME [*a little nonplussed*]. I was off to other business; so was in a hurry, Father.

SIMON. He 'd left me to carry the sack alone.

JEROME. I 'd been carrying it alone first, till you came.

SIMON. Yes, and couldn't; so I came down to help you. And this all the thanks I get!

JEROME. Thanks? You only came because you were told to. And I 'd only to go for it, because *you* just hadn't.

[*Momentarily the lifted voices of ANGELO and PACIFICO, and the 'Gloria' recited standing, indicate that one of their exercises has ended. They sit down and begin another. For escape from the entanglements of life, the 'De Profundis' is the one they have chosen.*]

JEROME. He never remembers to do anything, till he 's told a dozen times of it. He 's the biggest ass God ever made, Father!

FRANCIS. No, Brother; not the biggest. God, in His mercy, has made one much bigger than either of you. . . . Brother Angelo, go and tell Brother Juniper that I want him.

[ANGELO goes. *In the ensuing silence, PACIFICO continues complacently to recite his office.*]

PACIFICO. Qui loquuntur pacem cum proximo suo; mala autem in cordibus eorum. Da illis secundum opera eorum; et secundum nequitiam adinventionum ipsorum. Secundum opera . . .

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

FRANCIS. Little Brothers, you that have contended in foolishness, for a prize which is not yours, and a crown of folly which belongs to another, now shall I show you a wonder of God's making—that very perfect ass which is named Juniper.

[*Whereat* BROTHER PACIFICO'S devotions come to an abrupt end, in a mouth that remains open; and all the Brothers are sitting and staring expectant, as JUNIPER enters, followed by ANGELO.

FRANCIS. Brother Juniper, you have been spilling the flour.

JUNIPER [*bewildered*]. No, Father — indeed, Father!

FRANCIS. It was your fault that it was spilled, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Was it, Father? How, Father?

FRANCIS. Because one fool makes many—by contact and example, by word and by deed. [JUNIPER *gapes and gesticulates*.] Aye, also by gesture, and by appearance, Juniper; so that, wherever he goes, foolishness goes with him. And you are a fool, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father.

FRANCIS. And by being a fool, you upset others, so that they also become fools, in their uprisings and their upsettings. Therefore it was you made fools of them.

JUNIPER [*as he takes in the situation*]. Yes, Father. And did I make Sister Flour a fool too, Father? Did I upset *her*?

FRANCIS. You upset everything, Juniper.

JUNIPER [*slowly realising his guilt*]. Yes; then

BROTHER ASS

I suppose I did, Father. [*Then to the flour.*] Forgive me, Sister : I 'm sorry !

FRANCIS. How did you come to upset it, Juniper ?

[*This is too hard a nut for JUNIPER to crack ; he stands helpless, scratching his head.*]

JUNIPER. . . . I don't know, Father.

FRANCIS. Then listen, and I will tell you. . . . Brother Simon had been told to go down and fetch the flour, and had forgotten to.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father ?

FRANCIS. So Brother Jerome went instead.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father ?

FRANCIS. And after a while, weary with the weight, and slow at carrying it, Brother Simon, on being reminded, went to help him.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father ?

FRANCIS. But when they got here, Brother Jerome, being more tired than Brother Simon—having carried it first and furthest, and wishing Brother Simon to be as tired as he was—so that in all things they might share alike . . .

JUNIPER. To be sure, Father !

FRANCIS. Therefore did Brother Jerome go his own way, and leave Brother Simon to finish the carrying of it alone.

JUNIPER. Did he so, Father ?

FRANCIS. So, bearing the weight alone, Brother Simon staggered and got in the way of Brother Jerome—which was *his* way, so he tells me.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father.

FRANCIS. So Brother Jerome pushed him, which was a foolish thing to do—though believing it to be a wise thing.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

JUNIPER. That 's like *me*, Father.

FRANCIS. For then Brother Simon pushed likewise, and, overbalancing, he fell—foolishly ; and straightway the sack opened its mouth, and the flour was spilt.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father ?

FRANCIS. Therefore it is thou who hast spilt the flour, Juniper—making them both foolish.

JUNIPER [*now seized of the situation*]. Dear Father ! To be sure, so it was, Father ! . . . [*He advances, first to JEROME, then to SIMON.*] I 'm sorry, Brother. . . . Brother, I 'm sorry. . . . God o' mercy ! Am I so catching, Father, that I ought to be shut up away from everybody, for fear of doing 'em more mischief ? . . . Ought I, Father dear ?

FRANCIS. What do *you* say, Brothers ?

JEROME [*compunctious and ashamed*]. That you 've made me feel—worse than a fool, Father.

SIMON [*similarly converted*]. Indeed, you have *me*, Father.

[*JEROME and SIMON look at each other, then turn simultaneously, and begin shovelling the flour back into the sack.*]

FRANCIS. That is well, Brothers. . . . See, Juniper, how freely now they have forgiven thee, gathering up the flour thou hast spilt.

SIMON. Don't rub it in, Father !

JUNIPER. Eh ! The Lord bless it to them !

FRANCIS. So He has, Brother.

JUNIPER. And to all of us !

[*He makes a move to help ; but FRANCIS pulls him back by his cord, and sits holding it.*]

ANGELO and PACIFICO, finding the moment

BROTHER ASS

propitious, break out once more into pious recitation ; but it stops when FRANCIS, with JUNIPER kneeling before him, begins to narrate wonders.

Juniper, hast thou ever told them the story of how once, on a dark night, I rode on thy back, mistaking thee for an ass ?

JUNIPER [*in a fresh bewilderment*]. No, Father !

FRANCIS. Then I will tell it myself.

JUNIPER. When did it happen, Father ?

FRANCIS [*tenderly amusing himself*]. Often, Brother.

JUNIPER. O Lord ! the things we do to each other in this world, not knowing !

FRANCIS. 'Twas a dark night, Brothers ; and I, returning from a long journey, with more miles still before me, felt a sickness of fever come on me, so that my feet failed and my senses began to leave me. Then, in the darkness, I heard by the wayside the braying of an ass ; and feeling, but not able to see, I found what I thought to be an ass tethered by the way ; for when I took hold of it by the hair—*so [he demonstrates upon JUNIPER]*—it spake to me with an ass's voice. So I said to myself, ' Here has God, foreseeing my need and infirmity, sent this ass to succour and comfort me. So very thankfully, having loosed the halter, I got upon his back, and I rode. And all the way home his voice was very sweet to me, braying as an ass brays before rain.

JUNIPER. But that wasn't *me*, was it, Father ?

FRANCIS. Who else could it have been, Juniper ? When we got here to the gate, how it happened I

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

know not; only that being faint and out of my senses, I must have fallen. And when I came to myself, truly it was no ass but Brother Juniper himself that was carrying me.

JUNIPER. Oh, Father, I found you there at the gate, lying! and a bruise to your head as big as an onion, where happen the beast must have kicked you; for you said then, Father, 'twas Brother Ass that had brought you.

FRANCIS. But had you, Juniper?—had you kicked me?

JUNIPER. No, not *I*, Father dear! God forbid! 'Twas the ass that had run and hadn't waited—for fear after what he'd done, maybe.

FRANCIS. There was no ass but you, Juniper; and there you still were carrying me.

JUNIPER [*wonder-struck*]. And was it truly *me*, Father, that you found tethered by the road?

FRANCIS. None else, Brother.

JUNIPER. And did I bray to you in the dark night? And did you get on my back and let me carry you?

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother.

JUNIPER [*with growing amazement*]. And had I four hoofs, Father, and long hairy ears and a tail? Oh, not a tail, Father!

FRANCIS. I forgot to look for the tail, Brother; but on his back there was a cross. So when I sat on it, I thought of our Lord, and blessed Him for having given me—you, Juniper.

JUNIPER. You did, Father? The Lord bless you for it! But it's a strange thing that I don't remember it.

BROTHER ASS

FRANCIS. No, Brother. Many things we do and are—without knowing. One may be an ass without knowing it; also one may be wise without knowing it. . . . And one may be made in the likeness of love, also without knowing it—Brother Juniper.

JUNIPER. Amen, Father dear! Make just what you like of me, so long as you make use of me.

FRANCIS. Amen; so I will, Brother—always; never fear! . . . See, Brothers! Here is Juniper, so foolish, yet so full of wisdom. I have made mock of him; I have made a fool of him; I have told lies of him; yet he is not angry with me, but grateful. Learn of him—how to be fools, Brothers!

SIMON. Yes, Father; but without thee to teach it us, we'd never learn the meaning of Brother Juniper!

FRANCIS. No?

SIMON. For when he means nothing, you make him mean everything!

FRANCIS. Very true, Brother. That is the use of fools—that we can give them a meaning though they have it not. Even as you take an instrument of wood and playing on it make music, so have I made music for you from this Juniper.

[The refilled sack has now been hoisted again; for, in spite of all its adventures, bread is going to be made of it. BROTHER SIMON, helped by BROTHER JEROME, carries it to the gate; then turns to speak. ANGELO and PACIFICO, rising from their seats, recite the 'Gloria' while the others are speaking.]

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

SIMON. Farewell, Brother! God keep us to peace!

JEROME. Amen, Brother.

[*And as they go out, BROTHER ANGELO and BROTHER PACIFICO, seeing this as a fitting opportunity for the close of their devotions, go out also. For a while the remaining two sit silent, then FRANCIS speaks.*]

FRANCIS. Doth it never grieve thee, Juniper, that God made a fool of thee?

JUNIPER. No, Father. . . . Why should it, Father?

FRANCIS. Nor when I make a fool of thee?

JUNIPER. No, Father. . . . What else am I good for?

FRANCIS. And has none ever asked thy pardon, for making a fool of thee?

JUNIPER. No, Father; why should he if God doesn't?

FRANCIS. God is God, Brother. But I now do ask thy pardon.

JUNIPER. For why, Father?

FRANCIS. Because, to make thee a help for others, I fooled and mocked at thee.

JUNIPER. Oh, don't make me cry, Father!

FRANCIS [*drawing his hand across his eyes*]. No need, Brother, now I have done it for thee.

[*JUNIPER kneels up, and looking into the face of FRANCIS, slowly realises with disappointment the untruth of the tale.*]

JUNIPER. Then you didn't ride me after all, Father?

FRANCIS. Oh, Juniper, what I spake then was

BROTHER ASS

but parable ; and yet true. For that night, being unfriended and without comfort, in my darkness I thought of thee, whose mind God has tethered in sweet foolishness, to be my aid. And as I so thought, I seemed to hear thy voice like the braying of an ass ! Then, in my weariness, I rested my weight on thee ; and in the cold felt the warmth of thee ; and in the darkness had comfort because of thee. So that night by thee was my grief lightened, and my sickness stayed, and my way made easy ; and when, having for weakness fallen at the gate, I wakened again, I found thee of a truth still carrying me. . . . Of all my Brothers none hath carried me further, or more tenderly, than thou hast done. Now a little further, and till the last time, Juniper—be always near to carry me !

JUNIPER. Do you know, Father, that when I have you by me, God works in me a great wonder !

FRANCIS. What is that, Brother ?

JUNIPER. I *understand*, Father !

FRANCIS. Aye ! You, in your heart, always understand—when others fail me. So now, once more, Juniper, lift me and bear me in ! For by myself, to-day, I cannot.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father, yes ! Here is thy ass ; get on his back, Father ! [JUNIPER *stoops*, and FRANCIS *mounts*.] Oh, blessed be God ! Here am I getting old and stiff, but you're no weight to me at all. . . . Are you there, Father ?

FRANCIS. I am, Brother.

JUNIPER. You're *sure* you're there this time, Father ; not deceiving yourself, nor making mock of me ?

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

FRANCIS. No, Brother ; not this time.

JUNIPER. So that 's you ; and this is me ? And you feel quite safe, Father dear ?

FRANCIS. Quite, Brother.

[*On a sudden thought, JUNIPER sets him down again, and turns.*]

JUNIPER. And I haven't really got a tail to my back, have I, Father ?

FRANCIS. No, Brother, no ! God in thee has done a wonder, when making thee a perfect ass He gave thee no tail !

JUNIPER. And I wouldn't like to have a tail, Father. God forbid !

FRANCIS. Why not, Brother ?

JUNIPER. Because the Devil has got one.

FRANCIS. The Devil has many good things, Brother ; but makes an ill use of them. But hadst thou a tail, Juniper . . .

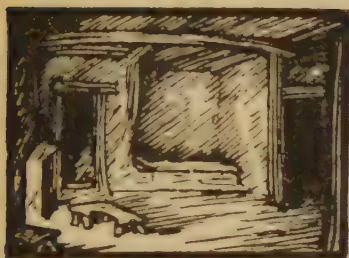
JUNIPER. Yes, Father ?

FRANCIS. Then I think the Devil would lose his ; and all tails would get to Heaven. . . . Up with me, Juniper—and sing !

[*JUNIPER hoists him once more : halts a moment to collect his powers ; then, with the loud braying of an ass, gallops him into the Friary. Even after they have entered, the joyous sound continues—a challenge to the community. No wonder the Brothers come running.*]

CURTAIN

MAKERS OF MIRACLE



In the Community room, on a portable bed in one corner of it, lies FRANCIS. Bandaged feet and hands, covering the marks of the stigmata, give a date not far from the end. On the other side of the room is an open hearth, with a fire on it; round about it are a bench and a few stools. From a door at the back JUNIPER looks in, and with

rapt reverence stands watching, till FRANCIS, becoming aware, opens eyes at him.

FRANCIS. Juniper.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father?

FRANCIS. Come and talk to me.

JUNIPER. What about, Father?

FRANCIS. Life, Brother.

JUNIPER. That's too big a bite for *my* wits, Father. Life, eh? Which life, then? If it's this, ye mean—God keep you in it, is all *I* pray. But if I was to start talking to ye about Heaven now——

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother?

JUNIPER. I should put my foot in it, so you'd never get there.

FRANCIS. Your foot is in it already, Brother.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

JUNIPER. Not my head, though ! And as I can't talk on my toes, there 's no telling ye about it with them. Are you better, Father dear ?

FRANCIS. I shall be, Juniper, when you have talked to me.

JUNIPER. Sure, Father, what you take to be a cure, others would want to die of.

FRANCIS. So they might, Juniper. God's ways are wonderful. But we have only to love them well enough, and we shall all die—of happiness.

JUNIPER. But I want to keep you alive, Father ! Must that make you miserable ?

FRANCIS. No, Brother. One cannot be miserable with you.

JUNIPER. Yet we are all miserable sinners, Father.

FRANCIS. Without knowing it, God being merciful. *[He stops ; pain takes hold of him.]*

JUNIPER. Have you a bad pain, Father ?

FRANCIS. Pain is good, Brother ; when it has company. . . . Talk, Juniper !

[But the pain that FRANCIS is bearing is too evident for JUNIPER to find talk easy ; he can only 'make conversation.'

JUNIPER. It 's snowing, Father.

FRANCIS. Yes ?

JUNIPER. I came through it ; had my feet in it ; when I looked back, there were the marks how I 'd come, all the way. You could count every step—though 'twas getting dark then. . . . I hope God doesn't remember to count all our sins that way !

FRANCIS. No, Brother, no. He does not.

MAKERS OF MIRACLE

JUNIPER. If He did, I'd have to start walking on my head.

FRANCIS. Why, Brother ?

JUNIPER. Because—though my sins have got two feet under 'em—'twould be only one head : so that 'd halve the track of 'em, at any rate. . . . What are you laughing at, Father dear ?

FRANCIS. At you, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Has it cured the pain ?

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother. Go on.

JUNIPER. So while I was looking back to see the way I'd come, I saw something else. . . . Listen, Father ! There, alongside in the snow, tripping the same way, little feet, little feet—oh ! ever so little : smaller than any bird's—so small, they made me afraid, Father.

FRANCIS. Of what, Brother ?

JUNIPER. Sure, of myself : for being so much bigger, yet no better.

FRANCIS. Than what ?

JUNIPER. 'Twas a mouse, Father !

[On this important discovery JUNIPER makes a pause, that FRANCIS may feel the thrill of it.]

FRANCIS. Yes ?

JUNIPER. And presently, just ahead of me, I saw her running, running for her life !

FRANCIS. Yes ?

JUNIPER. So I followed her.

FRANCIS. To save it ?

JUNIPER. She saved it for herself, Father. In she ran, under the gate, into the garden, with me after her. Just in time I looked over ; and there she was going down into the snow, some

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

little way of her own, by where the parsley used to grow.

FRANCIS. Where it is growing still, Brother. For though Sister Snow is cold in her bed, others she keeps in life and gives warmth to.

JUNIPER. Sure, I never thought of it !

FRANCIS. So there be three sisters in one bed : Sister Snow, Sister Parsley, and Sister Mouse.

JUNIPER. Doing what, Father ?

FRANCIS. I don't know, Juniper : finding life in the way God meant them to.

JUNIPER. Does a mouse, when it can't get meal, or grain, eat parsley, do you think, Father ?

FRANCIS. It may, Juniper ; for parsley is good eating, so good that often before now I have eaten more of it than was wise.

JUNIPER. Would parsley make *me* wise, Father ?

FRANCIS. No, Brother.

JUNIPER. Sure, then, I needn't be afraid of it.

FRANCIS. Be afraid of nothing, Juniper——
Where are you going ?

JUNIPER. There 's a pot on, Father. I 'm making you some broth. And while I 'm gone, Brother Angelo and Brother Jerome, and the new Brother you haven't seen yet, shall come in and look after you. They 're in the kitchen now warming themselves.

FRANCIS. I would rather be alone, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father ; but you mayn't be. It 's against orders. But they shan't talk to you, Father : and don't you talk to them. You 've talked enough.

FRANCIS. Is it on holy obedience, Juniper, that I am not to talk ?

MAKERS OF MIRACLE

JUNIPER. It's on holy obedience that you talk when you want to talk, and not when any one else wants you. I'll tell them you are just off to sleep ; and you won't make me be telling a lie, will you, Father ?

FRANCIS. I won't make you do anything, Juniper, that isn't in you to do.

JUNIPER. Then you're asleep, aren't you, Father ?

FRANCIS [*drowsily*]. Yes, Brother . . . yes.

[JUNIPER gives a sigh of satisfaction ; then, with a hushing sound, as a mother over the cradle of her child, stands watching. Presently reverent awe takes hold of him ; he is silent a while, then speaks.]

JUNIPER. O Lord, keep your holy eyes on him ! When he's asleep, doesn't he look beautiful ? Like a well of deep water, and the moon shining in it so clear !

[*He goes softly out.*]

FRANCIS [*murmuring softly to himself*].

Sister Mouse
Has her house
Down below
In the snow.
Where the parsley bed
Is spread ;—
Nothing there to show—
Sister Mouse
Has her house
Down below.

[JUNIPER re-enters, accompanied by JEROME, ANGELO, and the Novice.]

JUNIPER. Yes, he's asleep ; I've his own word

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

for it ; so you 're not to talk to him ! Go, and sit over there and talk to yourselves—quietly, so you don't wake him. And if he talks to you, in his sleep, give him the short answer for it, and tell him I say he 's not to be awake till his broth 's ready for him. *[He goes out.]*

NOVICE. Which of us is that, Brothers ?

JEROME. Brother Juniper.

ANGELO. He is very foolish and ignorant.

JEROME. But the little Father has found a use for him.

ANGELO. And when he is ill he attends on him.

NOVICE. The little Father ! oh, may I go and look at him ?

ANGELO. He lies there, Brother.

JEROME. Go reverently.

ANGELO. Remembering the miracle.

JEROME. His whole life is now a miracle.

ANGELO. Aye, surely.

NOVICE. He is asleep.

ANGELO. No, Brother ; not asleep. He is in a trance, or having a vision.

NOVICE. Does he tell you his visions ?

ANGELO. Everything that he says now we write down.

JEROME. The Father Minister has commanded it.

NOVICE. Why, Brother ?

ANGELO. Because all that he says now is holy, and full of mystery, and comes from God.

JEROME. For our instruction—and to keep us from the world. You have your tablets, Brother Angelo ?

MAKERS OF MIRACLE

ANGELO. Of course, Brother.

JEROME. Also the Father Minister has ordered that he shall never be left alone, lest anything he say be unrecorded.

ANGELO. Which is why I am here now with my tablets.

NOVICE. Are you always able to understand, or to interpret what he says, Brother ?

JEROME. No, Brother : but when we do not, the Father Minister understands it for us.

ANGELO. That is why he has ordered us to write everything down as soon as it is uttered.

NOVICE. What you tell me is very wonderful, Brothers. It frightens me.

ANGELO. We also are full of holy fear, Brother.

[The sound of a sigh came from the bed.]

JEROME. Hush ! Did he speak ?

[They rise from their seats, and stand looking toward FRANCIS ; and are so standing, expectantly, when JUNIPER re-enters.]

JUNIPER. Are you doing as I told you, now ? Not waking him to have him talk to you ?

[ANGELO puts finger on lip ; JEROME follows suit. The Novice catches the infection and does likewise. Their warning sibilation sounds in chorus.]

JUNIPER. Keep as ye are, then ! His broth is almost ready for him. *[He goes out.]*

NOVICE *[a little crestfallen]*. So ?—He does take food, then, sometimes ?

ANGELO. Only on holy obedience, Brother, and because Father Minister commands it. Had he

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

his own choice, I think he would eat nothing—
living only on things spiritual.

ANGELO. How he lives, even now, is a great
mystery.

JEROME. A great miracle.

*[Softly from the bed, FRANCIS lifts an arm ; he
opens his eyes, and to the holy agitation of the
three listeners begins to speak. They all go
upon their knees. ANGELO gets out his tablets
and starts writing.]*

FRANCIS. Sister Mouse
Has her house
Down below
In the snow.
Softly, softly, softly tread !
Where the parsley bed
Is spread,—
Nothing but her feet to show,—
Sister Mouse
Has her house
Down below.

[A short silence follows.]

JEROME. Have you written it, Brother ?

ANGELO *[busy writing]*. Sh !

[They watch him while he finishes.]

JEROME. What—what does it mean ?

ANGELO. We must be humble, Brother, and
patient. Father Elias will tell us what it means.

JEROME. ‘Sister Mouse, has her house’: that
must mean the soul and the body, surely!—but
why in the snow ?

ANGELO. I have it all written down, Brother.
Father Elias will explain.

MAKERS OF MIRACLE

NOVICE. Sh ! See !

[FRANCIS *slightly raises himself*.

JEROME. He is awake. He has heard us.

FRANCIS. Who is there ?

ANGELO [*rising*]. There are three of us, little Father. I am Brother Angelo ; this is Brother Jerome ; and here is the new Brother just come.

[*The Novice rises, advances, and kneels.*

FRANCIS. God bless thee, little new Brother, and give thee peace ! 'Tis a cold night : you have come through the snow ?

NOVICE. Yes, Father.

FRANCIS. Sit, and warm yourself. . . . Brother Angelo ?

ANGELO. Yes, Father ?

[*He hands his tablets to* JEROME. JEROME *writes.*

FRANCIS. Brother Juniper is making a broth for me. Go into the garden, get some parsley, take it, and tell him to put it in the broth, so as to flavour it.

ANGELO. But, little Father, the garden has hardly any parsley in it ; and only in one place, which, now that it is dark, I shall not be able to find.

FRANCIS. But go and try, Brother.

JEROME. Indeed, Father, I have tried already only to-day. Brother Rufus sent me for it ; but there was so much snow I could not find where it grew.

FRANCIS. Try again, Brother.

JEROME. But now, Father, it is snowing again, so that it lies deeper. And it is dark, also.

FRANCIS. Yes ; but try, Brother.

[ANGELO and JEROME *look at each other in perplexity. The tablets are neglected.*

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

ANGELO. Father, we cannot quite understand. We do not think that you mean parsley. What do you mean ?

FRANCIS. I mean—parsley, Brother.

ANGELO. Perhaps you had better go, Brother. Perhaps, when you fail to find any, his meaning will be revealed to us.

FRANCIS. Yes, do go, Brother ! [JEROME goes.

ANGELO. I am afraid he will be a long time, Father.

FRANCIS. I can wait, Brother.

ANGELO. And if he cannot find any, Father ?

FRANCIS. Then I can have it some other day.

[*Re-enter* JUNIPER.

JUNIPER. Ah ! There you are awake again ! Father dear, would you like a bit of parsley put into your broth, so as to flavour it ?

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother.

JUNIPER. D'you think one of the Brothers could go, then, and get it for me ?

FRANCIS. I think he could, Brother.

JUNIPER. And will one of you, then ?

FRANCIS. One of them has gone, Brother. I sent him.

JUNIPER. Oh, that was thoughtful of ye, now ! And it means you 'd got a fancy for it, doesn't it ?

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother.

JUNIPER. And that you 're going to enjoy eating it !

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother.

JUNIPER. The Lord be praised ! Ah, He knows how to make you better, doesn't He ?—when He 's got Juniper to help Him do it.

MAKERS OF MIRACLE

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother.

[*This conversation about things material has not been at all to the liking of BROTHER ANGELO, who now summons JUNIPER, to warn him of the mistake he is making.*]

ANGELO. Brother . . . Brother Juniper!

JUNIPER [*crossing to the call*]. Aye?

ANGELO. I charge you, Brother, not to talk so much. Here, while you were away, something has been happening.

JUNIPER. Eh? What was it, then?

ANGELO. I cannot explain, Brother. It is still a mystery. When Brother Jerome returns, what it means may be revealed to us.

NOVICE. The little Father has had a vision, Brother.

JUNIPER. What, another? He gets more than is good for him, I'm thinking.

NOVICE. Saying strange things——

ANGELO. And laying on us a strange command, which we could not understand—but yet have obeyed.

[*Behind their backs, meanwhile, BROTHER JEROME has returned; he approaches the bed.*]

JEROME. Here it is, little Father!

JUNIPER. Why, he's been and fetched us the parsley!

ANGELO. Oh, wonder! Oh, miracle!

FRANCIS. So: you found it, Brother?

JEROME. Yes. I went, Father, even as you told me, though doubting much—for it was almost dark. And there, under the wall where the snow lay light, I put down my hand—so; and feeling about where it was lightest, I found this, Father. Picking it,

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

I did not know what it was ; but when I brought it to the light, then I saw that, though much of it was grass, there was parsley in it too—a very little.

JUNIPER. Eh, but it 's enough ! So now, Father, you 'll have your broth flavoured just as you wanted it—the Lord be praised !

[He takes it, and runs out.]

ANGELO. Little Father, forgive our lack of faith ! Thou hast done a wonder !

FRANCIS. O Brothers, when I ask for something to be done, I wish you would not make me say it—so often !

[FRANCIS shuts his eyes again. Another Brother enters, and, while ANGELO draws JEROME mysteriously aside for the communication of his awe-struck mind, stands listening.]

ANGELO. So now it is revealed to us ! This he did to try our faith ; and to confirm it hath wrought miracle !

FRANCIS *[almost in a whisper]*.

Sister Mouse

Has her house

In the snow. . . .

There, down below,

Parsleys grow.

[The Brothers, crossing themselves, hold their breath and wait for more, till continued silence tells them that, for the moment, revelation is over.]

JEROME. Write it down, Brother ! Write it down !

[ANGELO brings out his tablets ; then, catching sight of the newly arrived Brother, stops to give him an errand.]

MAKERS OF MIRACLE

ANGELO. Go, Brother, quickly : tell Father Minister I have holy news for him.

[*The Brother scuttles out in haste.*

FRANCIS. Softly, softly, softly tread !

Where the parsley-bed

Is spread,

In the snow,

Nothing but her feet to show !

JEROME. Did you hear that, Brother ?—Write it down !

[*The Brother re-enters, still on the scutter with excitement.*

BROTHER. I 've told him ; I 've told all of them ! Father Minister is coming, Brother.

[*FATHER ELIAS enters, followed hurriedly at intervals by other Brothers, who all gather round to listen. At the entrance of ELIAS, ANGELO and those with him rise up in meek reverence.*

ELIAS. Yes, Brother ?

ANGELO. Father Minister, the little Father has been speaking again.

ELIAS. Well, Brother ?

ANGELO. In words we could not understand—that seemed mystery.

ELIAS. Go on, Brother !

ANGELO. Then, after having spoken, he gave command that brought . . . wonder !

ELIAS. Give me your report, Brother, quickly. Have you it written ?

ANGELO. I was still writing it when you came, Father.

ELIAS. Report what you have heard ; and let the writing be afterwards.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

ANGELO [*crossing himself*]. In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. . . . First he spoke in parable, Father ; not to us sitting here, but as though he beheld it above his head, in a vision.

[*Awe begins to descend on the listening community ; one by one they cross themselves.*]

I wrote down the words, Father.

ELIAS. Read them !

ANGELO. Sister Mouse
Has her house
Down below
In the snow. . . .

[*He looks at FATHER MINISTER to gather its effect on him.*]

What does that mean, Father ?

JEROME. Does it mean the soul and the body, Father ?

BROTHER. Or does the mouse mean a nibbling pain, Father ?

ELIAS. Continue, Brother. We will consider what it means afterwards.

ANGELO. Then, Father, he spoke of parsley ; and surely that seemed a great mystery, that he should speak of parsley at such a time, so near to his dying, and he so holy ! We could not understand what it meant, Father.

JEROME. Does the parsley mean the Blessed Sacrament, do you think, Father ?

ELIAS. Continue, Brother.

ANGELO. Then, Father, came the marvel. He told one of us, on holy obedience, to go and fetch it for him.

ELIAS. Fetch what, Brother ?

MAKERS OF MIRACLE

ANGELO. The parsley, Father. But I said that in the dark, and the deep snow, only by miracle could one find any. But he said one of us was to go instantly.

JEROME. He said that three times, Father.

ELIAS. Yes ?

ANGELO. So Brother Jerome went. And all the time Brother Jerome was gone, there was light in his eyes, Father, like the lamp burning before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament. We were very much afraid, Father.

[The awe-struck interest of the listening Brothers has now become intense. Only ELIAS remains unmoved.]

ELIAS. Continue, Brother.

ANGELO. So Brother Jerome went, Father ; and the night was so dark he could not see his own hand even, nor where his feet were taking him. But no sooner had he entered the garden (for it was to the garden the little Father had told him to go ; and 'tis marvel how he got there !) . . . there, under the wall, on the snow lay a light !

[He looks at JEROME for confirmation.]

JEROME. 'Twas so, Father.

ANGELO. And just there, where the light most shone . . . sent by the little Father, to show him the way . . . he put out his hand and took up what first came to it. What had come to his hand he did not know till he lifted it to the light. And the light showed that it was parsley, Father !

[A breath of wonder escapes from the listening Brothers ; and in a devoutly receptive atmosphere the inspired narrative goes on.]

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

JEROME. Which I could never have found of myself, Father : no, Father !

ANGELO. And then, Father, when he had brought it back rejoicing, and showed it to him, the little Father said : [*he searches his tablets*] I haven't yet got it written, Father.

ELIAS. Said ?

ANGELO. 'So in faith you found it, Brother ?' And he said, 'Yes, Father : but first I doubted.' Then the little Father said, 'O Brothers, sheep of my flock, doubt nothing ! Whatever I tell you to do, on holy obedience, do it instantly.' Then did we know, Father, why he had sent for the parsley—so that he might teach us by miracle to have faith and to be obedient.

ELIAS. Anything more, Brother ?

ANGELO. Yes, Father. After Brother Juniper had taken the parsley to put in the broth which he is making, presently we heard the little Father saying again the same words :

Sister Mouse

Has her house

In the snow.

There—down below—

Parsleys grow. . . .

ELIAS. What then, Brother ?

ANGELO. Then we all crossed ourselves, Father, and waited, praying. And then, just before you came, the little Father said . . . Brother Jerome, you heard—what did he say ?

[*As JUNIPER enters, carrying the steaming broth, from the bed behind comes a voice.*]

FRANCIS. The little Father said 'Ba-a-a !'

MAKERS OF MIRACLE

[They all turn and look ; but apparently FRANCIS is only talking in his sleep, or in a trance, or is having a vision. The voice of the bewildered JUNIPER breaks the silence.]

JUNIPER. What have ye all been doing to him, making a sheep of him ?

JEROME *[to ANGELO]*. Write it down, Brother !
Write it down !

CURTAIN

THE ORDER OF RELEASE



It is morning ; the sun shines upon the wall of the Convent of St. Damien's, in the centre of which stands a door, the upper part of it a grille. Inside, a Lay-sister is seen sweeping. Immediately above the door is a window all bars, with inner shutters, which, being part open, let out from within the sound of the Sisters of the Community singing

their Office. JUNIPER enters, carrying a large basket laden with eatables. With a heavy sigh he sets it down before the door, and seats himself dejectedly on a stone bench by the side of it. The singing catches his melancholy attention ; he raises his head to listen, but finds no cheer in it. Presently he sights a wood-louse crossing the path in front of him. That's better—here is life that he can talk to.

JUNIPER. Aye ; go your way, little sister, go your way ! You 've the legs for it—more than I have ; sixteen to my two ! You 'll die a good death before I do—the Lord helping you. And if anybody finds you good to eat, you 'll be more use in this world than ever I 'll be ! [*With a sigh he returns to silent meditation.*]

[*At this point the Lay-sister opens one half of the door inwards, on the side away from where JUNIPER is seated, and begins to sweep out the*

THE ORDER OF RELEASE

refuse. As she does so, she sights the basket, lays by her broom, and comes out to inspect. Then she sees JUNIPER, but—his face being covered by his hood—is not quite sure of him.

LAY-SISTER. Brother; Brother Juniper, is that you?

JUNIPER [*melancholy of tone*]. Aye.

LAY-SISTER. What brings you here, so early?

JUNIPER. Yon thing without legs asked me to carry it. In there is food for you.

LAY-SISTER. God reward your charity, Brother!

JUNIPER. It's not mine.

LAY-SISTER. But you brought it.

JUNIPER. As I was told. There's no charity in that. You've just got to.

LAY-SISTER. Who was it told you, Brother?

JUNIPER. Nobody *you* know. But one that you do, told *him*, maybe. It's what's left over from last night, that they didn't eat at the Bishop's table. 'You're to take that down to the little Sisters, by the Bishop's orders,' he says. So if it's the Bishop's orders, it's not for us to doubt but it's God's orders too. So you can thank Him for it. And if you thank Him, and He didn't, He'll forgive you, maybe.

[All this is said so cheerlessly and unlike himself to those who know him, that the Sister's attention becomes solicitude.]

LAY-SISTER. Brother . . . what is the matter?

JUNIPER. All the world's the matter! . . . And yet God made it: though, by the look of it, you'd never think so. Eh! If it wasn't for the little Father I'd have no faith in me left!

LAY-SISTER. How is the little Father?

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

JUNIPER. If you 'll fetch Sister Clare, you 'll save me telling it twice. Where is she ?

LAY-SISTER. With all the others up there, saying the office.

JUNIPER. Tell 'em, when they 've done, I 've got news for 'em : something that wants more praying to put it right than I can do.

LAY-SISTER. I think they *have* finished, Brother ; I don't hear them now.

[*Indeed the morning office is already over ; and*
SISTER CLARE, *passing the window, followed*
by others, stops at sound of voices below and
looks out.

JUNIPER [*meditatively*]. No : but there 's a lot that goes on in the world that we can't hear—ever. Yet it goes on, Sister. Twenty-three years ago, *here 's* where I first set eyes on him.

LAY-SISTER. Who ?

JUNIPER. The little Father. . . . He was young, then, and beautiful like an angel ! . . . He wasn't in pain then—nor hadn't any sorrow—none that mattered. He was building : two others with him. 'Twas then I came ; and Brother Silvestro—a priest he was then, and rich ; and Sister Giacomina, she came too. I wish she 'd come now, Sister ! That day, I remember, she said a thing—made the little Father so happy—that he just stood there, where you are now, Sister—saying it, over and over to himself again : he so full of it !

LAY-SISTER. Saying what ?

JUNIPER. 'All the world is a-building ! All the world is a-building !' . . . And it seemed true then.

[*He sighs heavily.*

THE ORDER OF RELEASE

CLARE. It is true still, Brother.

JUNIPER [*looking up*]. What? Were you there listening, Sister dear? True is it? Where do you get that from, now?

CLARE. From the world, Brother. God is in it, making us grow with all the rest of it.

JUNIPER. O Sister! dear Sister Clare, come down, then, and talk to me! It's you I've been wanting, that's got the sense and the understanding to make me sure again of things I can't be sure of myself.

CLARE. I am coming, Brother.

[*She disappears from the window.*]

JUNIPER [*shaking his head*]. Eh, but she knows; she knows! You can tell it by her voice. . . . And there's the sun goes on shining—right into my eyes . . . not into my heart, though. My heart hasn't got eyes left to see it now.

CLARE [*appearing at the gate*]. The little Father, Brother; how is he?

[*JUNIPER makes a forlorn gesture, turns his face to the wall, and weeps. The Lay-sister, awaiting orders, shows the basket to SISTER*

CLARE.

Take it in, Sister; and when you have emptied it, bring it back with you. Then, go down into the garden and pick a bunch of lavender—for all of us: from the bush nearest the gate, Sister.

[*The Lay-sister, with a motion of obedience, goes in, carrying the basket. SISTER CLARE stands watching JUNIPER.*]

The little Father does not weep, Brother. So neither must we.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

JUNIPER [*struggling to express himself*]. O Sister, it 's not because he 's dying that I 've lost myself. It 's the way they 're making him die is what breaks my heart. Sister, they are killing him !

CLARE. Where is he, Brother ? Two days ago we heard he had returned—not to Portiuncula, but to Assisi.

JUNIPER. Yes : he 's at the Bishop's palace, Sister. And the citizens have put a guard round him.

CLARE. A guard ? Why, Brother ?

JUNIPER. So that he mayn't get out : so they shan't take him away ! He 's got to stay in Assisi, they say—till he dies there.

CLARE. And our little Father : what does he say ?

JUNIPER. They don't let him say anything—that they 'll give any heed to. He wants to be down at Portiuncula—for the end, Sister ; so as to be where he first made us be Brothers. And they won't let him !

CLARE. Doubt not, Brother, if it be God's will, the little Father will find a way to it.

JUNIPER. Yes, Sister : but they are making it hard for him.

CLARE. He never wanted things to be easy, Brother.

JUNIPER. No, Sister dear . . . but I 'm not happy about him ; nor he 's not happy about himself, either. The way they 've got hold of him—it 's like the Day of Judgment ; and them with a pair of scales, all so terribly holy, weighing the pieces of him. And there they sit, like a row of corpse-lights, watching him, and one of them with a

THE ORDER OF RELEASE

big extinguisher, holding it over his head, ready to come down on him, and pinch him out the shape they want him to be.

CLARE. What shape, Brother ?

JUNIPER. They are breaking him to bits, to make a miracle of him ! It 's just this, Sister [*he breaks into weeping*], it 's just this : they want him dead and gone to his glory, more than they want him alive !

CLARE. He wants that himself, Brother.

JUNIPER. He has the right to want it : they haven't ! They want it for bad reasons ; not good ones like him.

CLARE. Do not forget charity, Brother !

JUNIPER. No, Sister. But it 's queer places one has to look round to find her, nowadays. They 've put her away. He wants her at his side to comfort him—so that he can smile and laugh, when the pain lets him. They won't let him smile : they won't let him laugh, either : it 's not holy enough for 'em.

CLARE. But he always has you, Brother.

JUNIPER. Yes, Sister ; but what can I do ? Playing the fool is all I 'm good for.

CLARE. That is where you are of such use to him, Juniper.

JUNIPER. Yes, Sister : but they don't think so. That 's why I was turned out and sent here—on 'an errand of charity.' . . . Do you know, Sister, I was tempted—sore tempted, I was—as soon as I 'd got through the gate where no one could see, to throw it all away and run back again, and just pretend I 'd brought it !

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

CLARE [*smiling*]. You did well, Brother, not to yield to the temptation.

[*A Sister appears within the grille as if to make request. CLARE beckons.*

Yes, Sisters, come and listen, all of you.

[*The Sisters appear, and stand looking out at JUNIPER through the grille.*

[*Then to JUNIPER*] For would not the little Father wish that we should have news of him? Are not we also his sheep in another fold? And is not his voice dear to us?

JUNIPER. Yes, Sister.

CLARE. And who can bring him near to us better than you, Brother Juniper? Had you come empty-handed you would have been as welcome.

[*Taking the basket from the hand of the Lay-sister she sets it outside again, while the Lay-sister goes on her errand to the garden.*

But had you not come at all you would have left us hungry and sorrowful, having no word of him. Did he send us no message?

JUNIPER [*shaking his head*]. He was asleep, Sister. That's how they got me away—he being asleep, and knowing nothing of it.

CLARE. That is good news, Brother—that the little Father can sleep. Give me more news of him.

JUNIPER. Eh! There he lies—just a bright shadow of himself—in the room the Bishop has lodged him. It's a great honour, so they tell me. Yes, I suppose; but it isn't quiet and restful like Portiuncula would be. For all hours there's folk pushing in and out—peering at him; and twice a day having him up to the window, showing him to

THE ORDER OF RELEASE

the people ; and he too sick by rights to see anybody. 'Take me down to Portiuncula !' he says ; but his voice is all so weak now they pretend not to hear him ; so nothing 's done. And he pining to go, Sister ! It 's hard, hard treatment they 're giving him ; but I can't make 'em do different—can I ?

CLARE. Maybe no, Brother. So it is no fault of yours.

JUNIPER. If it 'd do him any good, me standing on my head all day, or having myself beaten or flayed alive for him—I wouldn't wish better than to have it done to me.

CLARE. I well believe it, Brother.

JUNIPER. Yesterday—while 'twas going on—the way I 've been telling you—the little Father (he can't see now, Sister ; hardly at all with his eyes, the light such a pain to 'em)—'Who 's there ?' he says ; and I say, 'It 's me, Father ; and there 's others waiting outside, wanting to have word of you.' And so there were, Sister, and Father Elias preaching to them—all about how holy he was, there in the midst of us. Then the little Father says to me—'Sing !' So I sang, Sister. And you know what kind of a voice I 've got. Then he sang too ; and a wonder it was where he got his voice from—the Lord helping him ; but like enough, me being the stronger, there was more noise than tune to it. So we 'd hardly got started when, killed of his preaching, in comes Father Elias—eyes first—they were so out of his head, Sister. 'You mustn't make that noise here !' he says. 'We can't help it,' says the little Father, 'we are going to Heaven.' And then Father Elias,

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

to make a short bolt of it, tells him it's not the proper and expected way for a saint to die in. 'Maybe not,' says the little Father; 'but it's the right way for a sinner. For in all my sinful life,' he says, 'I've never praised God as much as I ought to do; so I'm making up for it now.' Then Father Elias gets the Bishop to him—but that's no good; for between them, the Bishop—by God's mercy—hasn't a thought he can call his own; so leaves it for the Doctor to say whether or no it's good for him. And the Doctor, God being merciful, says anything's good for him to do now that pleases him, so long as it's within reason. So then, Father Elias leaving us for a while, he sends me for Brother Bernard, and Brother Giles, and Brother John—not one of us with a voice you can keep a tune to—that we may all sing joyfully together—or separately maybe—according to how we feel about it. So there we were, Sister, our hearts full of the love of God and of the little Father—making a great noise, like as he'd asked us to—and Father Elias in and out the whole time, on the flutter, like a cook when the pancakes are burning—wanting it to stop, but not knowing how—the Doctor having said it was good for him. And when the little Father sleeps, we stop for a while; and when he wakes we go on again. It's a wonderful concert we've been having, Sister; and a marvel how the little Father doesn't tire of it. It's making a great scandal, Father Elias says, and he fears if the Pope hears of it he'll not make a saint of him. Is he doing it for a penance, do you think, Sister?

THE ORDER OF RELEASE

CLARE. No, Brother.

JUNIPER. What for, then ?

CLARE. For love—of you, and the Brethren, and Portiuncula.

JUNIPER. Love ? I wish we all loved him as he loves us. Sister, what 's the use for us to say we love him, and then do all so different from what he 'd have us do ?

CLARE. That is what we are always doing to Christ, Brother, when we sin. And since we make Him suffer, must not the little Father suffer also, in like kind ?

JUNIPER. Yes, I suppose so. But it 's not fair to either ; is it, Sister ?

CLARE. No, Brother.

JUNIPER. Here, only the other day, we were bringing him back home again. 'Take me back to Assisi, soon,' he 'd told us. '*Soon!*' We knew what that meant : that if we were too long, he 'd never get there. So we were bringing him as fast as he could bear it—the shortest way, by Perugia. Then we heard, Sister, that in Perugia they wanted to catch him, and keep him—so that they might have his body !—and had sent out a band to lie in wait for him. Is that loving him ? Is that loving him, I say ?

CLARE. No, Brother : desire of possession is not love. But some day they will know better.

JUNIPER. Aye : 'possession.' And didn't the little Father say we were to have none ?

CLARE. Well, Brother ?

JUNIPER. So when Father Elias hears of it, he sends word we 're to go the other way, by Foligno.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

And when they in Assisi hear of it—the citizens—they send armed men to be a guard for him—against them of Perugia. Oh, think of that happening to *him*! Doesn't it hit your heart? . . . When I saw them come out with swords and with spears to take him, I thought of Him in the garden at Gethsemane; and I wondered which was going to kiss him for a sign to the rest. They all kissed him, Sister—hands, feet, cord of his girdle, hem of his robe! And the little Father gave them a sweet blessing; but he was crying, Sister. They were breaking his heart for him; but he said nothing. 'Twasn't his life they cared about, for the wonder that was in it: 'twas his body, that's going to make them rich!

CLARE. But where his body lies, Brother, he will not be.

JUNIPER. No, Sister.

CLARE. Therefore what they do to his body matters little.

JUNIPER. No, Sister.

CLARE. Neither to him nor to any that truly love him. Therefore, be of good cheer, Brother; as he would have us be. And when you go back, sing to him again, Brother.

JUNIPER. Ah! You comfort me, Sister. I knew you could do it, if anybody.

CLARE. So now, Brother, return quickly: for when he wakes again he will need you.

JUNIPER. I've a sort of fear, Sister, that when I go back Father Elias is going to lock me out.

CLARE. He will not, Brother. But if he did

THE ORDER OF RELEASE

there would still be others. Sister, have you brought what I told you ?

LAY-SISTER. They all have it, little Mother, between them. I gave it to them.

[Through the grille one sees that each Sister has in her hand a few sprigs of lavender, which they have just received from the Lay-sister.]

CLARE. Here is some of our lavender, Brother. Give it to the little Father from all of us. Tell him it is from the bush which he planted : tell him it grows well, and is now full of flower. And when you give it him, give him our love, Brother ; and say that we all pray for him that he may have joy.

[The Sisters stretch out their hands through the grille ; JUNIPER collects the lavender into one bunch. The Sisters surrender their gift with little murmurs of love. JUNIPER responds with nods and smiles. Meanwhile, BROTHER JEROME has entered, and is surveying the scene with an air not of entire approval. He waits, however, till the whole bunch is collected before speaking.]

JEROME. Brother Juniper, you are wanted.

JUNIPER *[turning in trepidation]*. Who wants me ?

JEROME. Father Minister, Brother Elias, wants you. . . . My Lord Bishop wants you. . . . And the little Father wants you.

JUNIPER. Holy Trinity ! All three of 'em. What 's happening now ?

JEROME. They are taking the little Father to Portiuncula. You are to go with him. The little Father will not start till you 're there to go with him.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

[*With a whoop of joy, and a kick to the basket which lies in his way, JUNIPER makes a sprint across the stage and is off.*

JEROME [*calling after him*]. Brother Juniper—your basket !

CLARE. Aye ! But run, run, Juniper ! Oh, what a joyful pair of legs ! The Lord be with them !

JEROME [*in tone of rebuke*]. The Lord does not rejoice in any man's legs, Sister.

CLARE. Perhaps not, Brother ! But when a man's heart is in them, as Brother Juniper's is now—it becomes a question.

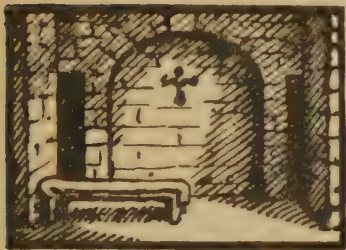
JEROME. Which I cannot discuss, Sister.

CLARE. No, Brother. O Sisters, how much ought we not to thank God for the making of this Juniper. There goes love to the little Father ! Run, run, Juniper ! Run !

[*Entirely oblivious to the disapproval of BROTHER JEROME, the Sisters all stand at the grille watching the departure of JUNIPER ; and the excited motion of their hands through the grille is like the fluttering of doves in a cage. JEROME grudgingly picks up the basket left by JUNIPER and goes his disapproving way back to Assisi.*

CURTAIN

THE LAST COMMENT



BROTHER JUNIPER's bed has been made for him in a room adjoining the chapel of the Friary, so that from there he may hear the Holy Office each day. A closed-up arch-way in the wall indicates that what is now two was once one. Old and worn, he lies with eyes shut ; but opens them and turns his head when—the watching Brother having

made way for her—SISTER GIACOMINA comes and sits down by the bed. Slowly, and with surprise at the admission of a woman to the Friary, he recognises her comfortable presence. They touch hands.

JUNIPER. Have they let you in, Sister ?

GIACOMINA [*with humorous significance in her tone*]. I have come in, Brother.

JUNIPER. Isn't that against the rules, Sister dear ?

GIACOMINA. An exception to the rule, Brother. But the rule was made *for* us, not against us. Were it not so, 'twould have no meaning.

JUNIPER [*sadly*]. Since the rule's been altered from what the little Father made it, it's had a hard meaning for me.

GIACOMINA. Rules often are hard, Brother : 'tis their nature.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

JUNIPER. And now—I 'm done with it.

GIACOMINA. Having done well with it.

JUNIPER. And I 'm wondering—if there 's as many rules in Heaven as there is for getting there—whether I 'll ever get so as to understand 'em. . . . And if I don't, Sister . . . ?

GIACOMINA. The little Father is there, Brother, to explain them.

JUNIPER [*with a deep breath of restless wonder*]. The little Father ! . . . Seeing him again, in his glory, shall I know him ?

GIACOMINA. Surely ; why, surely !

JUNIPER. Eh ! What 's a sinner like me got to be sure about ?

GIACOMINA. Love, Brother.

JUNIPER. Ah, you 've answered me ! We be sure of that, anyhow, through knowing *him*. . . . A wonderful love his was : made you so sure that where that came from—there must be more of it. And yet there 's millions of us, all through the world, that have eyes—looking, and seeing nothing ! . . . What are you thinking there, all by yourself, Sister ? . . . What are you smiling for ?

GIACOMINA. Because life is beautiful. Could we but see *how* beautiful, we also should see what lies beyond—as he did.

JUNIPER. What 'll it be, d' ye think ? Eh, Sister ?

GIACOMINA. More life, Brother ; and then more ! and then—still more.

JUNIPER. Eh, but different.

GIACOMINA. Without death : yes. But for all that, very much the same.

THE LAST COMMENT

JUNIPER. As what we 're seeing now ?

GIACOMINA. As what we are *not* seeing ; but is here with us all the time.

JUNIPER. The little Father : we saw *him*—quite plain—didn't we ?

GIACOMINA. Some more plainly than others : you better than most.

JUNIPER. Ah, the sight he was to me ! And wasn't it a mercy and a God's wonder that I should see him, for all I was made so foolish ?

GIACOMINA. Every good has mercy and wonder in it, Brother.

JUNIPER. Eh ! but it had to dig deep to find *me*.

GIACOMINA. No ; you were there, ready, waiting for it. The first time you saw him, did you not love him ?

JUNIPER. Sure ! and you there, too, Sister ! D'ye not remember ?

GIACOMINA. Yes, Brother.

JUNIPER. And what like, first time, was he to you, Sister ?

GIACOMINA. I was at his father's house, buying cloth. He was serving me. A beggar came asking alms in God's name. The little Father told him to go away.

JUNIPER [*amazed*]. He did that ?

GIACOMINA. He was but a boy, then. He went on serving me. All at once he threw up his hands : he was in tears. Leaving me, he ran after the beggar, gave him for his need, knelt, kissed his hand. . . . That is how I first saw him, Brother—first knew him ; thereafter remembered him.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

Four years later—you with us—we met again. Seeing him once, who could ever forget him ?

JUNIPER. Not you or I, Sister. But there's others. . . . Lying here, thinking—I've been troubled—troubled.

GIACOMINA. Why, Brother ?

JUNIPER. Because *they* 'll forget. They won't all remember him like we do.

GIACOMINA. No, Brother ; but for all that, the little Father will still be remembered. Even the world, though it goes not his way, will not forget him.

JUNIPER. But there's things he did, that you and I know—I more of 'em than you, maybe, for being oftener with him—that, when we're gone, 'll get forgotten—such beautiful things, Sister : they oughtn't just die with us when we die !

GIACOMINA. They won't, Brother.

JUNIPER. How not ?

GIACOMINA. In ways we can't see. Coming into the lives of others, there they sow seed ; and the seed lives and quickens, though whence sprung it knows not.

JUNIPER. But it all ought to be known. And if men were but wiser, and had more love in 'em, wouldn't they have cared so to get it said and written that never could it get lost like it's going to be ? Here am I—such a fool as never was nor will be in the world again—and yet I'm full of precious things that nobody knows of ! And when I'm gone, they're gone : aye, to seed, maybe ; but the shape of it, and the touch of it, and the sound of it won't be the same ever again.

THE LAST COMMENT

GIACOMINA. Life never stays the same, Brother ; growth changes it.

JUNIPER. Aye, but you keep telling of it. And when you can—and it's worth it—you get some one to write it all down for you. But for that, we 'd never have had the Gospels telling us of our Lord.

GIACOMINA. No ; that's true, Brother. You are right.

JUNIPER. So here am I, knowing so much, and remembering it all ; but such a fool that when I begin trying to tell of it—it doesn't come right, Sister. But it's all *here* ; and here's he, that I've so got hold of him he can't let me go. I haven't the right mind, nor the right words for it : but it's him—the very life of him—here in this poor body, going back to the dust ! . . . That's the only reason I've got, Sister, for not wishing to die.

GIACOMINA. But all that—you will take with you, Brother.

JUNIPER. Where it's not wanted like as it is here. . . . I've done so little for everybody—the poor world the little Father loved so : I wish, now it's come to the last, I could just empty myself out of all I know of him. But I can't !

GIACOMINA. You have, more than you guess, Brother.

JUNIPER. It must have been the same—what I'm so wishing now—with our Lord's own disciples ; simple men some of 'em, that couldn't write anything. Twelve : and for all that they've told us so much, think of all the lot more that'll never

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

be told—things that God Himself did on earth ! If only we could know what He did then, when they stop telling us—the next little thing, no matter how little it might be : only a kind word, maybe, to a poor, down-laden beast, or a child that had broke something and was crying over it ; or what He said to His Mother times when He went home again : what He said first thing in the morning when she came to wake Him ; how He comforted her when dear Saint Father Joseph was dead. And all His learning of things when He was a child : everyday things like that, done by God Himself, that men have forgotten ! It doesn't seem right, Sister.

GIACOMINA. But it is right, Brother ; and never has God willed it to be otherwise. It is so that we all live our lives ; we ourselves do not know, cannot remember all that has gone to make us what we are. We are brought to birth, grow, enter the common heritage, die hence, and are forgotten. For all lives that has been the way since life began. But—these helping—man is still in the making ; and God in His good time will make us all to be one.

JUNIPER. Yes . . . I suppose. But it wants faith to be sure of it.

GIACOMINA. You will not have to wait long to be sure now, Brother. Trust God—only for one more day. [*She pauses ; there is no answer.*] Is that—difficult ?

[*Again there is a pause ; then with sorrowful self-accusation* JUNIPER speaks.

JUNIPER. Dark !

THE LAST COMMENT

GIACOMINA. Are you afraid of the dark, Brother ?

JUNIPER. I am, where I find it, Sister—in myself. That 's where I 'm dark. ' Get rid of self,' he said : but I haven't done it.

GIACOMINA. Not quite ; almost.

[*The watching Brother has returned, and standing in the door makes a sign.* GIACOMINA rises.

Yes, Brother ; must I go ?

BROTHER. It 's the Angelus, Sister.

GIACOMINA [*to JUNIPER*]. Take up your weariness, and rest, Brother. Have no fear. Sleep ! God give you peace.

JUNIPER. Are you going ? Are you leaving me, Sister dear ?

GIACOMINA. Not very far ; not very long, Brother. We shall meet again.

JUNIPER [*reaching out to hold her*]. Soon, eh ?

GIACOMINA. In God's time. The order which we must obey has come for both of us. Go to sleep, Brother.

[*Meanwhile the BROTHER SACRISTAN has entered, and crossing quickly to the further door, is there seen ringing the Angelus.* GIACOMINA and the two Brothers recite the ' Ave Maria ' together. JUNIPER, already drowsing, does not join in, but as the last stroke of the bell dies away, he speaks.

JUNIPER. Sister Bell has a sweet sound . . . little Father. [*He goes to sleep.*]

[*Having rung the Angelus, the Sacristan returns to the door and stands waiting.*

GIACOMINA. Yes, Brother : in one moment.

WATCHER. He is asleep, Sister.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

GIACOMINA. What ? Obedient, so soon ? [*She kneels at the foot of the bed.*] O little Brother, simple and foolish, but wise, when thou comest of thy simplicity to the bright light of God, pray for me and for all sinners, that we also may become wise through Love !

[*She rises and goes silently out. The Watcher sits down by the bed ; his eyes are heavy with sleep, his head droops. Meantime, in the adjoining chapel the singing of the Office has begun. It gets dark ; a Brother enters carrying two tapers ; he pauses and gazes down on the sleeping JUNIPER, looks across at the other Brother, now asleep also, and passes through. Presently the singing of the Office becomes blended with a low vibration of sound, which merges gradually into the quick but muffled tolling of a bell, the urgency of its summons subdued by distance and the thickness of walls. Slowly the darkened chamber where JUNIPER lies asleep becomes filled with the figment of his dream. Amid the seated ranks of this shadowy tribunal, one form higher than the rest sits darkly enthroned. What light there is comes from behind, so that no face is seen. Presently from the seat of judgment comes the Voice of the presiding authority.*]

VOICE. Brother Juniper.

[*JUNIPER does not move, but his eyes open, and he answers in a voice faint with awe.*]

JUNIPER. Yes, Father.

VOICE. Stand out where all may look on thee !

THE LAST COMMENT

JUNIPER. Yes, Father. . . . But I can't, Father.

VOICE. Wherefor?

JUNIPER. I'm here, tied by the leg, Father. And on holy obedience I'm not to sit up till they tell me.

VOICE. Hear, then, and answer! What hast thou done with thy life, Brother?

JUNIPER. I don't know, Father. . . . Nothing, Father.

VOICE. Nothing?

JUNIPER. Nothing well enough that I ought to have done, Father. Many things well enough that I shouldn't have done.

VOICE. How 'well'—things that you should not?

JUNIPER. Well enough to please the Devil, Father.

VOICE. Many have complained of thee.

JUNIPER. The Lord help, heal, and keep them all from the hurt I've done to them!

VOICE. Doubt not He will, Brother; the better if thou art now penitent.

JUNIPER. Sure, I'm penitent for everything. I'd be penitent of being born; but God won't let me. It would be wrong, wouldn't it, Father? . . . And besides . . .

VOICE. Yea, speak!

JUNIPER. If I hadn't been born, I shouldn't have known the little Father.

VOICE. The little Father was not God, Brother. Thou wast born to know and worship God—not man, His creature.

JUNIPER. I should never have come to know Him, but for the little Father.

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

VOICE. Why ? Wast thou blind ?

JUNIPER. No ; only a fool, Father. But *he* loved, he knew, he made me understand.

VOICE. Is he here with thee—now ?

JUNIPER. Aye. . . . But it's dark . . . and down here is temptation.

VOICE. Thou canst not see him ?

JUNIPER. . . . Little Father ! . . . Little Father ! . . .

[There follows a pause.]

VOICE. Has he answered ?

JUNIPER. Why should he answer ? He's here.

VOICE. Is that all thou canst say for thyself ? If not, speak on !

JUNIPER. I've no more, Father.

VOICE. If any other hath charge or accusation to bring, let him speak now !

A MAN'S VOICE. Father, I was naked in sin ; this man clothed me. I used him roughly ; he thanked me. I robbed him ; he was grateful to me.

VOICE. Any other ?

A WOMAN'S VOICE. Father, my husband was in prison for theft ; we were starving. This man, having nothing of his own, went to the altar, and, to his own hurt, took alms from God to satisfy our need.

VOICE. Any other ?

VOICE OF ELIAS. Father, this man feared me : I had authority ; binding him to obedience I was cruel to him, despising his foolishness. But when I myself became an outcast, then he forgave, then he prayed for me ; and, serving me without fear, won for me pardon, penitence, reconciliation.

VOICE. Is there any other ?

THE LAST COMMENT

VOICE OF FRANCIS. Father, when God in His mercy made man, He made few wise, but many foolish. Then sent He His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be understood of fools better than of wise men. So, when He called me also to His service, the better to understand Christ and His Love for all, He gave me this fool for example and guide, for rest, and for refreshment. And because of him, in dark nights I found my way, and on long journeys failed not : so lived—he helping me !

VOICE. That is past, Brother. What use hast thou for him now, when all journeys are over, and nights ended ? Tell it, so that he may hear !

VOICE OF FRANCIS. O little sheep, hear my voice, make haste and come to me ! Yea, on holy obedience, I bid thee come !

JUNIPER. Name of Jesus ! . . . Little Father !

[Very dimly the form of JUNIPER is seen to rise up from the bed, and advance to where, in the midst of the tribunal, ST. FRANCIS is waiting for him ; and all at once, in a burst of song, voice answering voice, an old memory grows young again.]

FRANCIS and JUNIPER.

City of Nineveh,
City of Nineveh,
Look upon Juniper !
Look upon Juniper !
Great is his foolishness,
Great is his foolishness,
Like unto charity,
Like unto charity.

[JUNIPER has arrived. FRANCIS lays his arm over

THE COMMENTS OF JUNIPER

the shoulder of JUNIPER and draws him in. Their voices become lost among the voices of others ; but the song that is sung is still their song.

OMNES. Nineveh, Nineveh,
What are you weeping for ?
Blindness and hardness of heart without charity.
Nineveh, Nineveh,

What are you seeking for ?
Juniper's foolishness, prize above rubies.

Prize above rubies ;
Take and spend it !
Nothing can equal it ;
Nothing can mend it.
Pearls before swine it is ;

Find it or lose it !
Sweeter than wine it is ;
Therefore I choose it !

[*The scene closes in again ; once more one sees bare walls, a Watcher rousing from sleep, and on the bed the body of JUNIPER with arms wide. The BROTHER SACRISTAN enters, looks, crosses himself, kneels, and prays. The other Brother, waking, suddenly kneels also.*

CURTAIN

400

42 IS

8 1/2 - 11



W7-DJA-401

